

FAMOUS PLAYS OF 1935

NIGHT MUST FALL
EMLYN WILLIAMS

ACCENT ON YOUTH
SAMSON RAPHAELSON

CLOSE QUARTERS
W. O. SOMIN
English version
GILBERT LENNOX

GRIEF GOES OVER
MERTON HODGE

THE MASK OF VIRTUE
CARL SIERNHEIM
English version
ASHLEY DUKES

YOUTH AT THE HELM
PAUL VULPIUS
English version
HUBERT GRIFFITH

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NIGHT MUST FALL

Emlyn Williams

NIGHT MUST FALL

A Play
in Three Acts

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permission to perform it, whether by amateurs or professionals,
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To
M. W.

THE CHARACTERS

(in the order of their appearance)

THE LORD CHIEF JUSTICE

MRS. BRAMSON

OLIVIA GRAYNE Her niece

HUBERT LAURIE

NURSE LIBBY

MRS. TERENCE Mrs. Bramson's cook

DORA PARKOE Her maid

INSPECTOR BELSIZE

DAN

BEFORE THE PLAY

The Court of Criminal Appeal

*The action of the play takes place in the
sitting-room of Forest Corner, Mrs. Bram-
son's bungalow in Essex.*

The time is the present.

ACT I

A morning in October.

ACT II

SCENE I : An afternoon twelve days later.

SCENE II : Late afternoon, two days later.

ACT III

SCENE I : Half an hour later. Nightfall.

SCENE II : Half an hour later.

NIGHT MUST FALL was first presented in London by J. P. Mitchelhill at the Duchess Theatre on May 31st, 1935, with the following cast

<i>The Lord Chief Justice</i>	ERIC STANLEY
<i>Mrs Bramson</i>	MAY WHITTY
<i>Olivia Grayne</i>	ANGELA BADDELEY
<i>Hubert Laurie</i>	BASIL RADFORD
<i>Nurse Libby</i>	DOROTHY LANGLEY
<i>Mrs Terence</i>	KATHLEEN HARRISON
<i>Dora Parkoe</i>	BETTY JARDINE
<i>Inspector Belsize</i>	MATTHEW BOULTON
<i>Dan</i>	EMLYN WILLIAMS

The play produced by MILES MAILLON.

BEFORE THE PLAY

The orchestra plays light tunes until the house lights are turned down; the curtain rises in darkness, accompanied by solemn music. A small light group in the middle of the stage, and shows the LORD CHIEF JUSTICE sitting in judgment, wearing wig and red robes of office, in the Court of Criminal Appeal. His voice, cold and disapproving, gradually swells up with the light as he reaches his peroration.

LORD CHIEF JUSTICE . . . and there is no need to recapitulate here the arguments for and against this point of law, which we heard in the long and extremely fur summing up at the trial of the appellant at the Central Criminal Court. The case was clearly put to the jury, and it is against sentence of death for these two murders that the prisoner now appeals. Which means that the last stage of this important and extremely horrible case has now been reached. On a later page in the summing up, the learned judge said this *turning over papers* . . . "This case has, through the demeanour of the prisoner in the witness-box, obtained the most widespread and scandalous publicity, which I would beg you most earnestly, members of the jury, to forget." I cannot help thinking that the deplorable atmosphere of sentimental melodrama which has pervaded this trial has made the *theatre* a more fitting background for it than a court of law, but we are in a court of law nevertheless, and the facts have been placed before the court. A remarkable and in my opinion praiseworthy feature of the case has been that the *sanity* of the prisoner has never been called into question, and, like the learned judge, the Court must dismiss as mischievous pretence the attitude of this young man who stands convicted of two brutal murders in cold blood. This case has, from beginning to end, exhibited no feature calling for sympathy, the

evidence has on every point been conclusive, and on this evidence the jury have convicted the appellant. In the opinion of the Court there is no reason to interfere with that conviction, and this appeal must be dismissed.

[The chords of solemn music are heard again, and the stage gradually darkens. A few seconds later the music merges into the sound of church bells playing far away, and the lights come up on.]

ACT I

The sitting-room of Forest Corner, MRS. BRAMSON'S bungalow in a forest in Essex. A fine morning in October.

Centre back, a small hall ; in its left side the front door of the house (throughout the play, "left" and "right" refer to the audience's left and right). Thick plush curtains can be drawn across the entrance to the hall ; they are open at the moment. Windows, one on each side of the hall, with window-seats and net curtains beyond which can be glimpsed the pine-trees of the forest. In the left wall, upstage, a door leading to the kitchen. In the left wall, downstage, the fireplace ; above it, a crotonne-covered sofa, next to a very solid cupboard built into the wall ; below it a cane armchair. In the right wall, upstage, a door leading to MRS BRAMSON'S bedroom. In the right wall, downstage, wide-open paned doors leading to the sun-room. Right downstage, next the sun-room, a large dining-table with four straight chairs round it. Between the bedroom and the sun-room, a desk with books on it, a cupboard below it, and a hanging mirror on the wall above. Above the bedroom, a corner medicine cupboard. Between the hall and the right window, an occasional table.

The bungalow is tawdry but cheerful ; it is built entirely of wood, with an oil lamp fixed in the wall over the occasional table. The room is comfortably furnished, though in fussy and eccentric Victorian taste ; stuffed birds, Highland cattle in oils, anti-macassors, and wax fruit are unobtrusively in evidence. On the mantelpiece, an ornate chiming clock. The remains of breakfast on a tray on the table.

MRS BRAMSON is sitting in a wheeled chair in the centre of the room. She is a fussy, discontented, common woman of fifty-five, old-fashioned both in clothes and coiffure ; NURSE LIBBY, a kindly, matter-of-fact young north-country woman in district nurse's uniform, is sitting on the sofa, massaging one of her hands. OLIVIA GRAYNE sits on the old woman's right ;

holding a book ; she is a subdued young woman of twenty-eight, her hair tied severely in a knot, wearing horn-rimmed spectacles ; there is nothing in any way remarkable about her at the moment. HUBERT LAURIE is sitting in the armchair, scanning the "Daily Telegraph." He is thirty-five, moustached, hearty, and pompous, wearing plus fours and smoking a pipe.

A pause. The church bells die away.

MRS. BRAMSON (*sharply*) : Go on.

OLIVIA (*reading*) : " . . . Lady Isabel humbly crossed her attenuated hands upon her chest. 'I am on my way to God,' she whispered, 'to answer for all my sins and sorrows.' 'Child,' said Miss Carble, 'had I anything to do with sending you from . . . ' (*turning over*) ' . . . East Lynne ? ' Lady Isabel shook her head and cast down her gaze."

MRS. BRAMSON (*aggressively*) : Now that's what I call a beautiful character.

NURSE : Very pretty. But the poor thing'd have felt that much better tucked up in 'ospital instead of lying about her own home gassing her 'ead off——

MRS. BRAMSON : Sh !

NURSE : Sorry.

OLIVIA (*reading*) : " 'Thank God,' inwardly breathed Miss Corny. . . . 'Forgive me,' she said loudly and in agitation. 'I want to see Archibald,' whispered Lady Isabel."

MRS. BRAMSON : You don't see many books like *East Lynne* about nowadays.

HUBERT : No, you don't.

OLIVIA (*reading*) : " 'I want to see Archibald,' whispered Lady Isabel. 'I have prayed Joyce to bring him to me, and she will not——'"

MRS. BRAMSON (*sharply*) : Olivia !

OLIVIA : Yes, auntie ?

MRS BRAMSON (*craftily*) You're not skipping, are you?

OLIVIA Am I?

MRS BRAMSON You've missed out about Lady Judd taking up her cross and the weight of it killing her. I may be a fool, but I do know *I* is Lynne.

OLIVIA Perhaps there were two pages stuck together.

MRS BRAMSON Very convenient when you want your walk, eh? Yes, I *am* a fool, I suppose, as well as an invalid.

OLIVIA But I thought you were so much better—

NURSE You'd two helpings of bacon at breakfast, remember—

MRS BRAMSON Doctor's orders. You know every mouthful's agony to me.

HUBERT (*deep in his paper*) There's a man here in Weston-super-Mare who stood on his head for twenty minutes for a bet, and he hasn't come to yet.

MRS BRAMSON (*sharply*) I thought this morning, I'd never be able to face the day.

HUBERT But last night when you opened the port—

MRS BRAMSON I've had a relapse since then. My heart's going like anything. Give me a chocolate.

[OLIVIA rises and fetches her a chocolate from a large box on the table.]

NURSE How does it feel?

MRS BRAMSON Nasty. (*Munching her chocolate*) I know it's neuritis.

NURSE You know, Mrs Bramson, what you want isn't massage at all, only exercise. Your body—

MRS. BRAMSON : Don't you dictate to me about my body. Nobody here understands my body or anything else about me. As for sympathy, I've forgotten the meaning of the word. (*To OLIVIA*) What's the matter with your face?

OLIVIA (*startled*) : I—I really don't know.

MRS. BRAMSON : It's as long as my arm.

OLIVIA (*drily*) : I'm afraid it's made like that.

[*She crosses the room, and comes back again.*]

MRS. BRAMSON : What are you walking up and down for? What's the matter with you? Aren't you happy here?

OLIVIA : It's a bit lonely, but I'll get used to it.

MRS. BRAMSON : Lonely? All these lovely woods? What *are* you talking about? Don't you like nature?

NURSE : Will that be all for to-day?

MRS. BRAMSON : I suppose it'll have to be.

NURSE (*rising and taking her bag from the sofa*) : Well, I've that confined lady still waiting in Shepperley. (*Going into the hall*) Toodle-oo!

MRS. BRAMSON : Mind you call Wednesday. In case my neuritis sets in again.

NURSE (*turning in the hall*) : I will that. And if paralysis pops up, let me know. Toodle-oo!

[*She marches cheerily out of the front door.* MRS. BRAMSON *cannot make up her mind if the last remark is sarcastic or not. She concentrates on* OLIVIA.

MRS. BRAMSON : You know, you mustn't think just because this house is lonely you're going to get a rise in salary. Oh, no. . . . I expect you've an idea I'm worth a good bit of money, haven't you? . . . It isn't my money you're after, is it?

OLIVIA (*setting chairs to rights round the table*) : I'm sorry, but my sense of humour can't stand the strain. I'll have to go.

MRS. BRAMSON : Can you afford to go ?

OLIVIA (*after a pause, controlling herself*) : You know I can't.

MRS. BRAMSON : Then don't talk such nonsense. Clear the breakfast things.

[OLIVIA *hesitates, then crosses to the kitchen door.*

Muttering) : Sense of humour indeed, never heard of such a thing. . . .

OLIVIA (*at the door*) . Mrs. Terence, will you clear away ?

[*She goes to the left window, and looks out.*

MRS. BRAMSON : You wait, my girl. Pride comes before a fall. Won't catch a husband with your nose in the air, you know.

OLIVIA : I don't want a husband.

MRS. BRAMSON : Don't like men, I suppose ? Never heard of them, I suppose ? Don't believe you. See ?

OLIVIA (*resigned*) : I see. It's going to be a fine day.

MRS. BRAMSON (*taking up "East Lynne" from the table*) : It'll cloud over, I expect.

OLIVIA : I don't think so. The trees look beautiful with the sun on them. Everything looks so clean. (*Lifting up three books from the window seat*) Shall I pack the other half of Mrs. Henry Wood ?

MRS. BRAMSON : Mrs. Henry Wood ? Who's Mrs. Henry Wood ? Pack the other half of Mrs. Henry Wood ? What *are* you talking about ?

OLIVIA : She wrote your favourite book—*East Lynne*.

MRS. BRAMSON (*looking at her book*) : Oh (*Picking a paper out of it.*) What's this ? (*Reading ponderously*) A sonnet. "The flame of passion is not red but white, not quick but slow——"

OLIVIA (*going to her and snatching it from her with a cry*) : Don't !

MRS. BRAMSON : Writing *poetry* ! That's a hobby and a half, I must say ! " Flame of passion . . . " *well !*

OLIVIA (*crossing to the fireplace*) : It's only a silly poem I amused myself with at college. It's not meant for anybody but me.

MRS. BRAMSON : You're a dark horse, you are.

[MRS. TERENCE *enters from the kitchen. She is the cook, middle-aged, Cockney, and fearless. She carries a bunch of roses.*

MRS. TERENCE (*grimly*) : Would you be wanting anything ?

MRS. BRAMSON : Yes. Clear away.

MRS. TERENCE : That's Dora's job. Where's Dora ?

OLIVIA : She's gone into the clearing for some firewood.

MRS. BRAMSON : You can't expect the girl to gather firewood with one hand and clear breakfast with the other. Clear away.

MRS. TERENCE (*crossing to the table, under her breath*) : All right, you sour-faced old hag.

[HUBERT *drops his pipe. MRS. BRAMSON winces and looks away. MRS. TERENCE clears the table.*

HUBERT (*to OLIVIA*) : What—what was that she said ?

MRS. TERENCE : She 'eard. And then she 'as to save 'er face and pretend she 'asn't. She knows nobody but me'd stay with 'er a day if I went.

MRS. BRAMSON : She oughtn't to talk to me like that. I know she steals my sugar.

MRS. TERENCE : That's a living lie. (*Going round to her*) Here are your roses.

MRS. BRAMSON : You've cut them too young. I knew you would.

MRS. TERENCE (*taking up her tray and starting for the kitchen*) . Then you come out and pick the ones you want, and you'll only 'ave yourself to blame.

MRS. BRAMSON . That's a nice way to talk to an invalid.

MRS. TERENCE : If you're an invalid, I'm the Prince of Wales.

[*She goes back into the kitchen.*]

OLIVIA . Would you like me to read some more ?

MRS. BRAMSON : No. I'm upset for the day now. I'd better see she does pick the right roses. *Wheeling herself, muttering* That woman's a menace. Good mind to bring an action against her. She ought to be put away. . . . (*Shouting*) Wait for me, wait for me !

[*Her voices dies away in the kitchen. The kitchen door closes. HUBERT and OLIVIA are alone.*]

OLIVIA . That's the fifth action she's threatened to bring this week. (*She crosses to the right window.*)

HUBERT . She's a good one to talk about putting away. Crikey ! She'll be found murdered one of these days. . . . (*Suddenly reading from his paper*) " In India a population of three and a half hundred million is loyal to Britain ; now——"

OLIVIA : Oh, Hubert ! (*Good humouredly*) I thought I'd cured you of that.

HUBERT : Sorry.

OLIVIA : You've only had two weeks of her. I've had six.

[*A pause. She sighs restlessly.*]

HUBERT : Fed up ?

OLIVIA : It's such a very inadequate expression, don't you think ? . . . (*After a pause*) How bright the sun is to-day. . . .

[*She is pensive, far-away, smiling.*]

HUBERT : A penny for 'em.

OLIVIA : I was just thinking . . . I often wonder on a very fine morning what it'll be like . . . for night to come. And I never can. And yet it's got to. . . . (*Looking at his perplexed face*) It is silly, isn't it ?

[*DORA comes in from the kitchen with a duster and crosses towards the bedroom. She is a pretty, stupid, and rather sluttish country girl of twenty, wearing a maid's uniform. She looks depressed.*]

Who are those men, Dora ?

DORA : What men, miss ?

OLIVIA : Over there, behind the clearing.

DORA : Oh. . . . (*Perring past her*) Oh. 'Adn't seen them. What are they doing poking about in that bush ?

OLIVIA (*absently*) : I don't know. I saw them yesterday too, farther down the woods.

DORA (*lamely*) : I expect they're looking for something.

[*She goes into the bedroom.*]

HUBERT : She looks a bit off-colour, doesn't she ?

OLIVIA : The atmosphere must be getting her down too.

HUBERT : I'm wondering if I'm going to be able to stand it myself. Coming over here every day for another week.

OLIVIA (*smiling*) : There's nothing to prevent you staying at home every day for another week . . . is there ?

HUBERT (*still apparently reading his paper*) : Oh, yes, there is. What d'you think I invite myself to lunch every day for ? You don't think it's the old geyser, do you ?

OLIVIA (*smiling*) : No.

[*She comes down to the table.*]

HUBERT : Don't want to sound rude, et cetera, but women don't get men proposing to them every day, you know . . . (*Turning over a page*) Gosh, what a wizard machine—

OLIVIA (*sitting at the left of the table*) : I can't think *why* you want to marry me, as a matter of fact. It isn't the same as if I were very pretty, or something.

HUBERT : You do say some jolly rum things, Olivia, upon my soul.

OLIVIA : I'll tell *you* why, then, if it makes you feel any better. You're cautious ; and you want to marry me because I'm quiet. I'd make you a steady wife, and run a home for you.

HUBERT : There's nothing to be ashamed of in being steady. I'm steady myself.

OLIVIA : I know you are.

HUBERT : Then why aren't you keen ?

OLIVIA (*after a pause, tolerant but weary*) : Because you're an unmitigated bore.

HUBERT : A bore ? (*Horried*) Me, a bore ? Upon my word, Olivia, I think you're a bit eccentric, I do really. Sorry to be rude, and all that, but that's put the kybosh on it ! People could call me a thing or two, but I've never been called a bore !

OLIVIA : Bore's never are. People are too bored with them to call them anything.

HUBERT : I suppose you'd be more likely to say " Yes " if I were an unmitigated bounder ?

OLIVIA (*with a laugh*) : Oh, don't be silly. . . .

HUBERT (*going to her*) : You're a rum girl, Olivia, upon my soul you are. P'raps that's why I think you're so jolly attractive. Like a mouse one minute, and then this straight-from-the-shoulder business. . . . What is a sonnet ?

OLIVIA : It's a poem of fourteen lines.

HUBERT : Oh, yes, Shakespeare. . . . Never knew you did a spot of rhyming, Olivia ! Now that's what I mean about you. . . . We'll have to start calling you Elizabeth Brontë !

[She turns away He studies her.]

You are bored, aren't you ?

[He walks to the sun-room. She rouses herself and turns to him impetuously.]

OLIVIA : I'm being silly, I know—of course I ought to get married, and of course this is a wonderful chance, and—

HUBERT (*moving to her*) : Good egg ! Then you will ?

OLIVIA (*stalling*) : Give me a—another week or two—will you ?

HUBERT : Oh. My holiday's up on the twenty-seventh.

OLIVIA : I know I'm being tiresome, but—

MRS. BRAMSON (*in the kitchen*) : The most disgraceful thing I've ever heard—

HUBERT : She's coming back. . . .

[OLIVIA rises and goes to the right window. HUBERT hurries into the sun-room. MRS. BRAMSON is wheeled back from the kitchen by MRS. TERENCE, to the centre of the room. She (MRS. BRAMSON) has found the pretext for the scene she has been longing to make since she got up this morning.]

MRS. BRAMSON : Fetch that girl here. This minute.

MRS. TERENCE : Oh, leave the child alone.

MRS. BRAMSON : Leave her alone, the little snivelling thief? Fetch her here.

MRS. TERENCE (*at the top of her voice*) : Dora !
(*Opening the front door and calling into the trees*)
Dora !

OLIVIA : What's Dora done now ?

MRS. BRAMSON : Broken three of my Crown Derby, that's all. Thought if she planted them in the rose-bed I wouldn't be well enough ever to see them, I suppose. Well, I *have* seen.

MRS. TERENCE (*crossing and calling to the bedroom*) :
You're wanted.

DORA'S VOICE : What for ?

MRS. TERENCE : She wants to kiss you good morning, what d'you think. . . .

[*She collects the table-cloth, fetches a vase from the mantelpiece, and goes into the kitchen. DORA enters gingerly from the bedroom, carrying a cup and saucer on a tray.*

DORA : Did you want me, mum ?

MRS. BRAMSON : Crown Derby to you, my girl.

DORA (*uncertain*) : Beg pardon, mum ?

MRS. BRAMSON : I suppose you think that china came from Marks and Spencer ?

DORA : Oh. . . . (*Snivelling*) Oh . . . oh . . .

OLIVIA (*coming between DORA and MRS. BRAMSON*) : Come along, Dora, it's not as bad as all that.

DORA : Oh, yes, it is . . . Oh. . . .

MRS. BRAMSON : You can leave, that's all. You can leave.

[*Appalled, DORA drops the tray and breaks the saucer.*

That settles it. Now you'll *have* to leave.

DORA (*with a cry*) : Oh, please I . . . (*Kneeling, and collecting broken china*) Oh, ma'am—I'm no meself, you see. . . . (*Snivelling*) I'm in—terrible trouble. . . .

MRS. BRAMSON : Have you been stealing ?

DORA (*shocked*) : Oh, no !

OLIVIA (*after a pause*) : Are you going to have a baby ?

[*After a pause, DORA nods.*]

DORA (*putting the china in her apron*) : The idea of me stealing. . . . I do go to Sunday school, anyways. . . .

MRS. BRAMSON : So that's the game. Wouldn't think butter would melt in her mouth. . . . You'll have to go, of course ; I can't have that sort of thing in this house—and stop squeaking ! You'll bring my heart on again. It's all this modern life. I've always said so. All these films and rubbish.

OLIVIA : My dear auntie, you can't have a baby by just sitting in the pictures.

MRS. BRAMSON : Go away, and don't interfere.

[*OLIVIA goes to the left window. DORA rises.*]

(*Triumphantly*) So you're going to have a child. When ?

DORA (*sniffing*) : Last August Bank Holiday. . . .

MRS. BRAMSON : What ? . . . Oh !

DORA : I 'aven't got a penny only what I earn—and if I lose my job 'ere—

MRS. BRAMSON : He'll have to marry you.

DORA : Oh, I don't think he's keen. . . .

MRS. BRAMSON : I'll make him keen. Who is the gentleman ?

DORA : A boy I know ; Dan his name is—' leas' 'e's not a gentleman. He's a page-boy at the Tallboys.

MRS. BRAMSON : The Tallboys? D'you mean that new-fangled place all awnings and loud speakers and things?

DORA : That's right. On the by-pass.

MRS. BRAMSON : Just the nice ripe sort of place for mischief, it always looked to me. All those lanterns. . . . What's his character, the good-for-nothing scoundrel?

DORA : Oh, he's nice, really. He done the wrong thing by me, but he's all right, if you know what I mean. . . .

MRS. BRAMSON : No, I don't. Where does he come from?

DORA . He's sort of Welsh, I think 'E's been to sea, too. He's funny, of course. Ever so open. Baby-face they call him. Though I never seem to get 'old of what 'e's thinking, somehow—

MRS. BRAMSON : I'll get hold of what he's thinking, all right. I've had my knife into that sort ever since I was a girl.

DORA . Oh, mum, if I got him to let you speak to him—d'you think I could stay on?

MRS. BRAMSON (*after a pause*) : If he mairies you at once.

DORA : Shall I— (*Eagerly*) As a matter of fact, ma'am, he's gone on a message on his bicycle to Payley Hill this morning, and he said he might pop in to see me on the way back—

MRS. BRAMSON : That's right; nothing like visitors to brighten your mornings, eh? I'll deal with him.

DORA : Yes. . . . (*Going, and turning at the kitchen door—in impulsive relief*) Oh, ma'am—

MRS. BRAMSON : And I'll stop the Crown Derby out of your wages.

DORA (*crestfallen*) : Oh!

MRS. BRAMSON : What were you going to say ?

DORA : Well, ma'am, I *was* going to say I don't know how to thank you for your generosity. . . .

[*She goes into the kitchen. The clock chimes.*]

MRS. BRAMSON : Olivia !

OLIVIA : Yes, auntie ?

MRS. BRAMSON : You've forgotten again. Medicine's overdue. Most important.

[*OLIVIA crosses to the medicine cupboard and fetches the medicine. MRS. TERENCE comes in from the kitchen with a vase of flowers and barges between the sofa and the wheelchair.*]

MRS. TERENCE (*muttering*) : All this furniture . . .

MRS. BRAMSON (*to her*) : Did you know she's having a baby ?

MRS. TERENCE (*coldly*) : She did mention it in conversation.

MRS. BRAMSON : Playing with fire, that's the game nowadays.

MRS. TERENCE (*arranging flowers as OLIVIA gives MRS. BRAMSON her medicine*) : Playing with fiddlesticks. We're only young once ; that 'ot summer too. She's been a fool, but she's no criminal. And, talking of criminals, there's a p'liceman at the kitchen door.

MRS. BRAMSON : A what ?

MRS. TERENCE . A p'liceman. A hobby.

MRS. BRAMSON : What does he want ?

MRS. TERENCE : Better ask 'im. I know *my* conscience is clear ; I don't know about other people's.

MRS. BRAMSON : But I've never had a policeman coming to see me before !

[*DORA runs in from the kitchen.*]

DORA (*terrified*) : There's a man there ! From the p'lice ! 'E said something about the Tall-boys ! 'E—'e 'asn't come about me, 'as 'e ?

Mrs. TERENCE : Of couise he 'asn't—

Mrs. BRAMSON : He may have.

Mrs. TERENCE : Don't frighten the girl ; she's simple enough now.

Mrs. BRAMSON (*sharply*) : It's against the law, what she's done, isn't it ? (*To DORA*) Go back there till he sends for you.

[DORA *creeps back into the kitchen.*

OLIVIA (*at the left window*) : He isn't a policeman, as a matter of fact. He must be a plain-clothes man.

Mrs. TERENCE (*sardonically*) : Scotland Yard, I should think.

[BILSIZE *is seen outside, crossing the left window & the front door.*

Mrs. BRAMSON : That place in those detective books ? Don't be so silly.

Mrs. TERENCE : He says he wants to see you very particular—

[A sharp rat-tat at the front door.

(*Going to the hall*) On a very particular matter. . . .
(*Turning on Mrs. BRAMSON*) And don't you start calling me silly !

[*Going to the front door, and opening it.*

This way, sir. . . .

[BILSIZE *enters, followed by Mrs. TERENCE* He is an entirely inconspicuous man of fifty, dressed in tweeds ; his suavity hides any amount of strength.

BILSIZE : Mrs. Bramson ? I'm sorry to break in on you like this. My card. . . .

Mrs. BRAMSON (*taking it, sarcastically*) : I suppose you're going to tell me you're from Scotland Yard — (*She sees the name on the card.*)

BELSIZE : I see you've all your wits about you !

MRS. BRAMSON : Oh. (*Reading incredulously*)
Criminal Investigation Department !

BELSIZE (*smiling*) : A purely informal visit, I assure you.

MRS. BRAMSON : I don't like having people in my house that I don't know.

BELSIZE (*the velvet glove*) : I'm afraid the law sometimes makes it necessary.

[**MRS. TERENCE** gives him a chair next the table
He sits. **MRS. TERENCE** stands behind the table.

MRS. BRAMSON (*to her*) : You can go.

MRS. TERENCE : I don't want to go. I might 'ave to be arrested for stealing sugar.

BELSIZE : Sugar ? . . . As a matter of fact, you might be useful. Any of you may be useful. Mind my pipe ?

[**MRS. BRAMSON** blows in disgust and waves her hand before her face.

MRS. BRAMSON : Is it about my maid having an illegitimate child ?

BELSIZE : I beg your pardon ? . . . Oh no ! That sort of thing's hardly in my line, thank God . . . Lonely spot . . . (*To Mrs. TERENCE*) Long way for you to walk every day, isn't it ?

MRS. TERENCE : I don't walk. I cycle.

BELSIZE : Oh.

MRS. BRAMSON : What's the matter ?

BELSIZE : I just thought if she walked she might use some of the paths, and have seen—something.

MRS. BRAMSON } Something of what ?

MRS. TERENCE } Something ?

BELSIZE : I'll tell you. I—

[A piano is heard in the sun-room, playing
‘Merry Widow’ waltz]

(usually) Other people in the house?

MRS BRAMSON (*calling shrilly*) Mr. Laurie!

[The piano stops.]

HUBERT’S VOICE (*as the piano stops, in the sun-room*):
Yes.

MRS BRAMSON (*to OLIVIA, sourly*) Did you ask
him to play the piano?

[HUBERT comes back from the sun-room.]

HUBERT (*breezily*) Hello, house on fire or some-
thing?

MRS BRAMSON: Very nearly This is Mr.—er—
Bel—

BELSIZE Belsize

MRS BRAMSON (*drily*) Of Scotland Yard

HUBERT Oh . (*Apprehensive*) It isn’t about
my car, is it?

BELSIZE No

HUBERT Oh (*Shaking hands affably*) How do you
do?

BELSIZE How do you do, sir. . .

MRS BRAMSON He’s a friend of Miss Grayne’s
here Keeps calling.

BELSIZE Been calling long?

MRS BRAMSON Every day for two weeks. Just
before lunch.

HUBERT Well—

OLIVIA (*sitting on the sofa*): Perhaps I’d better
introduce myself I’m Olivia Grayne, Mrs.
Bramson’s niece I work for her.

BELSIZE Oh, I see. Thanks. Well now . . .

HUBERT (*sitting at the table, effusively*) : I know a chap on the Stock Exchange who was taken last year and shown over the Black Museum at Scotland Yard.

BELSIZE (*politely*) : Really—

MRS. BRAMSON : And what d'you expect the policeman to do about it ?

HUBERT : Well, it was very interesting, he said Bit ghoulsh, of course—

BELSIZE : I expect so. . . . (*Getting down to business*) Now I wonder if any of you've seen anything in the least out of the ordinary round here lately ? Anybody called—anybody strange wandering about in the woods—overheard anything ?

[*They look at one another.*]

MRS. BRAMSON . The only visitor's been the doctor—and the district nurse.

MRS. TERFENCE . Been ever so gay

HUBERT : As a matter of fact, funny thing did happen to me. Tuesday afternoon it was, I remember now.

BELSIZE : Oh ?

HUBERT (*graphically*) : I was walking back to my cottage from golf, and I heard something moving stealthily behind a tree, or a bush, or something

BELSIZE (*interested*) : Oh, yes ?

HUBERT : Turned out to be a squirrel.

MRS. BRAMSON (*in disgust*) : Oh ! . . .

HUBERT : No bigger than my hand ! Funny thing to happen, I thought.

BELSIZE : Very funny. Anything else ?

HUBERT : Not a thing. By Jove, fancy walking in the woods and stumbling over a dead body ! Most embarrassing !

MRS TERENCE : I've stumbled over bodies in them woods afore now But they wasn't dead
O no

Mrs BRAMSON Say what you know, and don't talk so much

MRS TERENCE Well I've told 'im all I've seen A bit o' love now and again Though 'ow they make do with all them pine-needles beats me

MISSIZIE Anything else ?

MRS BRAMSON Miss Grayne's always moping round the woods Perhaps *she* can tell you something

OLIVIA I haven't seen anything I'm afraid .
Oh I saw some men beating the undergrowth—

BESSIE Yes, I'm coming to that But no trumps, for instance ?

OLIVIA N-no, I don't think so

HUMPHRY "Always carry a stick's" my motto
I'd like to see a tramp try anything on with me
Whish ! Swish !

Mrs BRAMSON What's all the fuss about ? Has there been a robbery or something ?

BESSIE There's a lady missing

Mrs TERENCE Where from ?

BESSIE The Tallboys

Mrs BRAMSON That Tallboys again—

BESSIE A Mrs Chalfont

Mrs TERENCE Chalfont ? Oh, yes ! Dyed platinum blonde—widow of a colonel, so she says livin' alone, so she says, always wearin' them faldalaldy openwork stockings Fond of a drop, too That's 'er

HUMPHRY Why, d'you know her ?

Mrs. TERENCE : Never set eyes on 'er. But you know how people talk. Partial to that there, too, I'm told.

Mrs. BRAMSON What's that there ?

Mrs. TERENCE : Ask me no questions, I'll tell you no lies.

BELSIZE (*quickly*) : Well, anyway . . Mrs. Chalfont left the Tallboys last Friday afternoon, without a hat, went for a walk through the woods in this direction, and has never been seen since

[*He makes his effect*

Mrs. BRAMSON · I expect she was so drunk she fell flat and never came to.

BELSIZE · We've had the woods pretty well thrashed (*To OLIVIA*) Those would be the men you saw Now she was . . .

HUBERT (*taking the floor*) · She may have had a brain-storm, you know, and taken a train somewhere. That's not uncommon, you know, among people of her sort. (*Airing knowledge*) And if what we gather from our friend here's true—and she's both a dipsomaniac and a nymphomaniac—

Mrs. BRAMSON : Hark at the walking dictionary !

BELSIZE We found her bag in her room , and maniacs can't get far without cash however dipso or nympho they may be. . . .

HUBERT Oh

BELSIZE . She was a very flashy type of wo—she is a flashy type, I should say. At least I hope I should say . .

Mrs. BRAMSON · What d'you mean ? Why d'you hope ?

BELSIZE Well

OLIVIA : You don't mean she may be . . . she mayn't be alive ?

BELSIZE : It's possible.

MRS. BRAMSON : You'll be saying she's been murdered next !

BELSIZE : That's been known.

MRS. BRAMSON : Lot of stuff and nonsense. From a policeman too. Anybody'd think you'd been brought up on penny dreadfuls.

[OLIVIA turns and goes to the window.

BELSIZE (to MRS. BRAMSON) : Did you see about the fellow being hanged for the Ipswich murder ? In last night's papers ?

MRS. BRAMSON : I've lived long enough not to believe the papers.

BELSIZE : They occasionally print facts. And murder's occasionally a fact.

HUBERT : Everybody likes a good murder, as the saying goes ! Remember those trials in the *Evening Standard* last year ? Jolly interesting. I followed——

BELSIZE (rising) : I'd be very grateful if you'd all keep your eyes and ears open, just in case . . . (Shaking hands) Good morning . . . good morning . . . good morning, Mrs. Bramson. I must apologise again for intruding——

[He turns to OLIVIA, who is still looking out of the window.

Good morning, Miss . . . er . . .

[A pause.

OLIVIA (starting) : I'm so sorry.

BELSIZE : Had you remembered something ?

OLIVIA : Oh, no. . . .

MRS. BRAMSON : What were you thinking, then ?

OLIVIA : Only how . . . strange it is.

BELSIZE : What ?

OLIVIA : Well, here we all are, perfectly ordinary English people. We woke up . . . no, it's silly.

MRS. BRAMSON : Of course it's silly.

BELSIZE (*giving MRS. BRAMSON an impatient look*) : No, go on.

OLIVIA : Well, we woke up this morning, thinking, "Here's another day." We got up, looked at the weather, and talked ; and here we all are, still talking. . . . And all that time——

MRS. BRAMSON : My dear girl, who are you to expect a policeman——

BELSIZE (*quelling her sternly*) : If you please ! I want to hear what she's got to say. (*To OLIVIA*) Well ?

OLIVIA : All that time . . . there may be something . . . lying in the woods. Hidden under a bush, with two feet just showing. Perhaps one high heel catching the sunlight, with a bird perched on the end of it ; and the other—a stockinged foot, with blood . . . that's dried into the openwork stocking. And there's a man walking about somewhere, and talking, like us ; and he woke up this morning, and looked at the weather. . . . And he killed her. . . . (*Smiling, looking out of the window*) The cat doesn't believe a word of it, anyhow. It's just walking away.

MRS. BRAMSON : Well !

MRS. TERENCE : Ooh, Miss Grayne, you give me the creeps ! I'm glad it is morning, that's all I can say. . . .

BELSIZE : I don't think the lady can quite describe *herself* as ordinary, after that little flight of fancy !

MRS. BRAMSON : Oh, that's nothing ; she writes poetry. Jingle jingle——

BELSIZE : I can only hope she's wrong, or it'll mean a nice job of work for us ! . . . Well, if anything funny happens, nip along to Shepperton police station. Pity you're not on the job one. Good morning. . . . Good morning. . . .

MRS. TERENCE : This way. . . .

[She follows BELSIZE into the hall.]

BELSIZE : No, don't bother. . . . Good morning. . . .

[He goes out. MRS. TERENCE shuts the door after him.]

MRS. BRAMSON (to HUBERT) : What are you staying at ?

HUBERT (crossing to the fireplace) : Funny, I can't get out of my mind what Olivia said about the man being somewhere who's done it.

MRS. TERENCE (coming into the room) : Why, Mr. Laurie, it might be you ! After all, there's nothing in your face that *proves* it isn't !

HUBERT : Oh, come, come ! You're being a bit hard on the old countenance, aren't you ?

MRS. TERENCE : Well, 'e's not going to walk about with bloodshot eyes and a snarl all over his face, is he ?

[She goes into the kitchen.]

HUBERT : That's true enough.

MRS. BRAMSON : Missing woman indeed ! She's more likely than not at this very moment sitting in some saloon bar. On the films, I shouldn't wonder. (To OLIVIA) Pass me my wool, will you. . . .

[OLIVIA crosses to the desk. A knock at the kitchen door. DORA appears, cautiously.]

DORA : Was it about me ?

OLIVIA : Of course it wasn't.

DORA (relieved) : Oh. . . . Please, mum, 'e's 'ere.

MRS. BRAMSON : Who ?

DORA : My boy fr—my gentleman friend, ma'am, from the Tallboys.

MRS. BRAMSON : I'm ready for him. (*Waving aside the wool which OLIVIA brings to her.*) The sooner he's made to realise what his duty is, the better. I'll give him baby-face !

DORA : Thank you, ma'am.

[She goes out through the front door.]

HUBERT : What gentleman ? What duty ?

OLIVIA : The maid's going to have a baby. (*She crosses and puts the wool in the cupboard of the desk.*)

HUBERT : Is she, by Jove ! . . . Don't look at me like that, Mrs. Bramson ! I've only been in the county two weeks. . . . But is *he* from the Tallboys ?

MRS. BRAMSON : A page-boy or something of the sort.

[DORA comes back to the front door, looks back, and beckons. She is followed by DAN, who saunters past her into the room. He is a young fellow wearing a blue pillar-box hat, uniform trousers, a jacket too small for him, and bicycle-clips : the stub of a cigarette dangles between his lips. He speaks with a rough accent, indeterminate, but more Welsh than anything else.]

His personality varies very considerably as the play proceeds : the impression he gives at the moment is one of totally disarming good humour and childlike unself-consciousness. It would need a very close observer to suspect that there is something wrong somewhere—that this personality is completely assumed. DORA shuts the front door and comes to the back of the sofa.

MRS. BRAMSON (*sternly*) : Well ?

DAN (*saluting*) : Mornin', all !

MRS. BRAMSON : So you're Baby-face ?

DAN : That's me. (*Grinning.*) Silly name, isn't it? (*After a pause.*) I must apologise to all and sundry for this fancy dress, but it's my working togs. I been on duty this mornin', and my hands isn't very clean. You see, I didn't know as it was going to be a party.

MRS. BRAMSON : Party ?

DAN (*looking at OLIVIA*) : Well, it's ladies, isn't it ?

HUBERT : Are you shy with ladies ?

DAN (*smiling at OLIVIA*) : Oh, yes.

[*OLIVIA moves away coldly. DAN turns to MRS. BRAMSON.*]

MRS. BRAMSON (*cutting*) : You smoke, I see.

DAN : Yes. (*Taking the stub out of his mouth with alacrity and taking off his hat*) Oh, I'm sorry. I always forget my manners with a cigarette when I'm in company. . . . (*Pushing the stub behind his ear, as OLIVIA crosses to the armchair*) I always been clumsy in people's houses. I am sorry.

MRS. BRAMSON : You know my maid, Dora Parkoe, I believe ?

DAN : Well, we have met, yes . . . (*with a grin at DORA*).

MRS. BRAMSON (*to DORA*) : Go away !

[*DORA creeps back into the kitchen.*]

You walked out with her last August Bank Holiday ?

DAN : Yes. . . . Excuse me smiling, but it sounds funny when you put it like that, doesn't it ?

MRS. BRAMSON : You ought to be ashamed of yourself.

DAN (*soberly*) : Oh, I am.

MRS. BRAMSON : How did it happen ?

DAN (*embarrassed*) : Well . . . we went . . . did you have a nice bank holiday ?

MRS. BRAMSON : Answer my question !

HUBERT : Were you in love with the wench ?

DAN : Oh, yes !

MRS. BRAMSON (*triumphantly*) : When did you first meet her ?

DAN : Er—bank holiday morning.

MRS. BRAMSON : Picked her up. I suppose ?

DAN : Oh, no, I didn't pick her up ! I asked her for a match, and then I took her for a bit of a walk, to take her mind off her work—

HUBERT : You seem to have succeeded.

DAN (*smiling at him, then catching MRS. BRAMSON'S eye*) : I've thought about it a good bit since, I can tell you. Though it's a bit awkward talking about it in front of strangers ; though you all look very nice people ; but it is a *bit* awkward—

HUBERT : I should jolly well think it is awkward for a chap ! Though of course, never having been in the same jam myself—

MRS. BRAMSON : I haven't finished with him yet.

HUBERT : In that case I'm going for my stroll. . .

[*He makes for the door to the hall.*]

OLIVIA : You work at the Tallboys, don't you ?

DAN : Yes, miss. (*Grimacing*) Twenty-four hours a day, miss.

HUBERT (*coming to DAN'S left*) : Then perhaps you can tell us something about the female who's been murdered ?

[*An unaccountable pause. DAN looks slowly from OLIVIA to HUBERT, and back again.*]

Well, *can* you tell us? You know there was a Mrs. Chalfont staying at the Fallboys who went off one day?

DAN: Yes.

HUBERT: And nobody's seen her since?

DAN: I know.

MRS. BRAMSON: What's she like?

DAN (to MRS. BRAMSON): But I thought you said—or somebody said—something about—a murder?

HUBERT: Oh, we don't *know*, of course, but there *might* have been, mightn't there?

DAN (*suddenly effusive*): Yes, there might have been, yes!

HUBERT: Ever seen her?

DAN: Oh, yes. I used to take cigarettes and drinks for her.

MRS. BRAMSON (*impatiently*): What's she like?

DAN: What's she like? . . . (To MRS. BRAMSON) She's . . . on the tall side. Thin ankles, with one o' them bracelets on one of 'em (*Looking at OLIVIA*) Fair hair—

{ *A sudden thought seemed to arrest him. He goes on looking at OLIVIA.*

MRS. BRAMSON: Well? Go on!

DAN (*after a pause, in a level voice*): Thin eyebrows, with white marks, where they was pulled out . . . to be in the fashion, you know. . . . Her mouth . . . a bit thin as well, with red stuff painted round it, to make it look more; you can rub it off . . . I suppose. Her neck . . . rather thick. Laughs a bit loud; and then it stops (*After a pause*) She's . . . very lively (*With a quick smile that dispels the atmosphere he has unaccountably created*) You can't say I don't keep my eyes skinned, can you?

HUBERT : I should say you do ! A living portrait, if ever there was one, what ? Now——

MRS. BRAMSON (*pointedly*) : Weren't you going for a walk ?

HUBERT : So I was, by Jove ! Well, I'll charge off. Bye-bye.

[*He goes out of the front door.*]

OLIVIA (*her manner faintly hostile*) : You're very observant.

DAN : Well, the ladies, you know . . .

MRS. BRAMSON : If he weren't so observant, that Dora mightn't be in the fluminox she is now.

DAN (*cheerfully*) : That's true, ma'am.

OLIVIA (*rising*) : You don't sound very repentant.

DAN (*as she crosses, stiffly*) . Well, what's done's done's, my motto, isn't it ?

[*She goes into the sun-room. He makes a grimace after her and holds his left hand out, the thumb pointing downwards.*]

MRS. BRAMSON : And what does that mean ?

DAN : She's a nice bit of ice for next summer, isn't she ?

MRS. BRAMSON : You're a proper one to talk about next summer, when Dora there'll be up hill and down dale with a perambulator. Now look here, young man, immorality——

[*Mrs. TERENCE comes in from the kitchen.*]

MRS. TERENCE : The butcher wants paying. And 'e says there's men ferreting at the bottom of the garden looking for that Mrs. Chalfont and do you know about it.

MRS. BRAMSON (*furious*) : Well, they won't ferret long, not among my pampas grass ! . . .
(*Calling*) Olivia ! . . . Oh, that girl's never there. (*Wheeling herself furiously towards the*

kitchen as MRS. TERENCE makes a move to help her)
Leave me alone. I don't want to be pushed into
the nettles to-day, thank you *(Shouting*
loudly as she disappears into the kitchen) Come out
of my garden, you ! Come out !

MRS. TERENCE *(looking towards the kitchen as DAN*
takes the stub from behind his ear and lights it) .
Won't let me pay the butcher, so I won't know
where she keeps 'er purse, but I do know, so
put that in your pipe and smoke it !

DAN *(going to her and jabbing her playfully in the*
arm) They say down at the Tallboys she's got
enough inside of 'er purse, too

MRS. TERENCE Well, nobody's seen it open. If
you 'ave a peep inside, young fellow, you'll go
down in 'istory, that's what you'll do . . .
(Dan salutes her. She sniffs) Something's boiling
over

[She rushes back into the kitchen as OLIVIA comes
back from the sun-room]

OLIVIA Did Mrs. Bramson call me, do you
know ?

[A pause. He surveys her from under drooping lids,
rolling his cigarette on his lower lip]

DAN I'm sorry, I don't know your name

OLIVIA Oh .

[She senses his insolence, goes self-consciously to the
desk and takes out the wool]

DAN . Not much doin' round here for a girl, is
'ere ?

[No answer]

It is not a very entertaining quarter of the world
for a young lady, is it ?

[He gives it up as a bad job. DORA comes in from
the kitchen]

DORA *(eagerly)* : What did she . . . *(confused, seeing*
OLIVIA) Oh, beg pardon, miss. . . .

[She hurries back into the kitchen. DAN jerks his head after her with a laugh and looks at OLIVIA.]

OLIVIA (*arranging wool at the table*) : I'm not a snob, but, in case you ever call here again, I'd like to point out that though I'm employed by my aunt, I'm not quite in Dora's position.

DAN : Oh, I hope not. . . . (*She turns away, confused. He moves to her.*) Though I'll be putting it all right for Dora. I'm going to marry her. And I—

OLIVIA (*coldly*) : I don't believe you.

DAN (*after a pause*) : You don't like me, do you ?

OLIVIA : No.

DAN (*with a smile*) : Well, everybody else does !

OLIVIA (*absorbed in her wool-sorting*) : Your eyes are set quite wide apart, your hands are quite good. . . . I don't really know what's wrong with you.

[DAN looks at his outspread hands. A pause. He breaks it, and goes nearer to her.]

DAN (*persuasively*) : You know, I've been looking at you too. You're lonely, aren't you ? I could see—

OLIVIA : I'm sorry, it's a waste of time doing your stuff with me. I'm not the type. (*Crossing to the desk and turning suddenly to him*) Are you playing up to Mrs. Bramson ?

DAN : Playin' up ?

OLIVIA : It crossed my mind for a minute. You stand a pretty poor chance there, you know.

DAN (*after a pause, smiling*) : What d'you bet me ?

[OLIVIA turns from him, annoyed, and puts the wool away.]

MRS. BRAMSON *careers in from the kitchen in her chair.*

MRS. BRAMSON : They say they've got permits to look for that silly woman—who are *they*, I'd like to know ? If there's anything I hate, it's these men who think they've got authority.

DORITA : I don't think they're quite as bad as men who think they've got charm.

[*She goes back into the sun-room. DAN whistles.*]

MRS. BRAMSON : What did she mean by that ?

DAN : Well, it's no good her thinkin' *she's* got any, is it ?

MRS. BRAMSON (*sternly*) : Now, young man, what about Dora ? I——

DAN : Wait a minute. . . . (*Putting his hat on the table and going to her*) Are you sure you're comfortable like that ? Don't you think, Mrs. Bramson, you ought to be facin' . . . a wee bit more this side, towards the sun more, eh ? (*He moves her chair round till she is in the centre of the room, facing the sun-room*) You're looking pale, you know. (*As she stares at him, putting the stub in an ashtray on the table*) I am sorry. Excuse rudeness. . . . Another thing, Mrs. Bramson—you don't mind me sayin' it, do you ?—but you ought to have a rug, you know. This October weather's very treacherous.

MRS. BRAMSON (*blinking*) : Pale ? Did you say pale ?

DAN : Washed out. (*His wiles fully turned on, but not overdone in the slightest*) The minute I saw you just now, I said to myself, now there's a lady that's got a lot to contend with.

MRS. BRAMSON : Oh. . . . Well, I have Nobody knows it better than me.

DAN : No, I'm sure. . . . Oh, it must be terrible to watch everybody else stiding up and down enjoying everything, and to see everybody tasting the fruit——

[As she looks at him, appreciation of what he is saying grows visibly in her face.]

I'm sorry. . . . (*Diffidently*) I didn't ha' ought to say that.

MRS. BRAMSON But it's true ! As true as you are my witness, and nobody else— (*Pulling herself together*) Now look here, about that girl—

DAN : Excuse me a minute . . . (*Examining her throat, like a doctor*) Would you mind sayin' something ?

MRS. BRAMSON (*taken aback*) . What d'you want me to say ?

DAN . Yes. . .

MRS. BRAMSON : Yes. What ?

DAN There's a funny twitching in your neck when you talk—very slight, of course—nerves, I expect— But I hope your doctor knows all about it. D'you mind if I ask what your ailments are ?

MRS. BRAMSON . . . Hadn't you better sit down ?

DAN (*sitting*) . Thank you.

MRS. BRAMSON . Well, I have the most terrible palpitations I—

DAN : Palpitations ! (*Whistling.*) But the way you get about !

MRS. BRAMSON Oh ?

DAN . It's a pretty bad thing to have, you know. D'you know that nine women out of ten in your position'd be just sittin' down givin' way ?

MRS. BRAMSON : Would they ?

DAN : Yes, they would ! I do know, as a matter of fact. I've known people with palpitations. Somebody very close to me. . . . (*After a pause, solemnly*) They're dead now. . . .

MRS. BRAMSON (*startled*) : Oh !

DAN : My mother, as a matter of fact. . . .

[With finely controlled emotion, practically indistinguishable from the real thing.]

I can just remember her.

MRS. BRAMSON : Oh ?

DAN : She died when I was six I know that, because my dad died two years before that

MRS. BRAMSON (*vaguely*) : Oh.

DAN (*studying her*) : As a matter o' fact—

MRS. BRAMSON : Yes ?

DAN : Oh, no, it's a daft thing—

MRS. BRAMSON (*the old tart note creeping back*) : Come along now ! Out with it !

DAN : It's only fancy, I suppose . . . but . . . you remind me a bit of her.

MRS. BRAMSON : Of your mother ? (*As he nods simply, her sentimentality stirring*) Oh . . .

DAN : Have you got a son ?

MRS. BRAMSON (*self-puttingly*) : I haven't anybody at all.

DAN : Oh. . . . But I don't like to talk too much about my mother. (*Putting a finger unobtrusively to his eye*) Makes me feel . . . sort of sad. . . . (*With a sudden thought*) She had the same eyes very wide apart as you, and—and the same very good hands.

MRS. BRAMSON (*looking interestedly at her fingers*) : Oh ? . . . And the same palpitations ?

DAN : And the same palpitations. You don't mind me talking about your health, do you ?

MRS. BRAMSON : No.

DAN : Well, d'you know, you ought to get used to letung *other* people do things for you.

MRS. BRAMSON (*a great truth dawning on her*) .
Yes !

DAN : You ought to be *very* careful.

MRS BRAMSON : Yes ! (*After a pause, eyeing him as he smiles at her*) You're a funny boy to be a page-boy.

DAN (*shyly*) . D'you think so ?

MRS. BRAMSON : Well, now I come to talk to you, you seem so much better class—I mean you know so much of the world——

DAN : I've knocked about a good bit, you know. Never had any advantages, but I always tried to do the right thing.

MRS BRAMSON (*patronisingly*) . I think you deserve better—— (*Sharply again*) Talking of the right thing, what about Dora ?

DAN (*disarming*) : Oh, I know I'm to blame , I'm not much of a chap, but I'd put things straight like a shot if I had any money . . . But, you see, I work at the Tallboys, get thirty bob a week, with tips—but listen to me botherin' you with my worries and rubbish the state you're in well !

MRS. BRAMSON . No, I can stand it.

[OLIVIA comes back from the sun-room.

(*Pursing her lips, reflectively*) I've taken a liking to you.

DAN Well . . . (*looking round at OLIVIA*) That's very kind of you, Mrs. Bramson. . . .

MRS. BRAMSON : It's the way you talked about your mother. That's what it was.

DAN : Was it ?

OLIVIA (*at the left window*) : Shall I pack these books ?

DAN (*going to her with alacrity, taking the parcel from her*) . I'll post them for you.

OLIVIA Oh. . . .

DAN . I'm passing Shepperley post office on the like before post time to-morrow morning. With pleasure !

MRS BRAMSON . Have you got to go back ?

DAN Now ? Well, no, not really . . . I've finished on duty now I done that errand, and this is my half day.

MRS BRAMSON (*imperiously*) : Stay to lunch.

DAN (*apparently taken aback, after a look at OLIVIA*) . Well—I don't like to impose myself—

MRS BRAMSON In the kitchen, of course.

DAN . Oh, I know——

MRS BRAMSON : There's plenty of food ! Stay to lunch !

DAN Well— I don't know . . . all right, so long as you let me help a bit this morning . . . Don't you want some string for this ? Where's it kep' ?

MRS BRAMSON That woman knows. In the kitchen somewhere.

DAN Through here ?

[He tosses the books on the sofa and hurries into the kitchen. MRS BRAMSON holds out her hands and studies them with a new interest.]

MRS BRAMSON . That boy's got understanding.

OLIVIA : Enough to marry Dora ?

MRS BRAMSON You ought to learn to be a little less bitter, my dear. Never hook a man if you don't. With him and that Dora, I'm not so sure it wasn't six of one and half a dozen of the

other. I know human nature, and, mark my word, that boy's going to do big things.

[*A scurry in the garden. MRS. TERENCE rushes in from the front door, madly excited.*]

MRS. TERENCE : The paper-boy's at the back gate, and says there's a placard in Shepperley, and it's got "News of the World—Shepperley Mystery" on it !

MRS. BRAMSON : What !

OLIVIA : They've got it in the papers !

MRS. TERENCE : They've got it in the papers ! D'ye want any ? (*Beside herself.*)

MRS. BRAMSON : Catch him quick !

MRS. TERENCE : First time I ever 'eard of Shepperley being in print before—hi !

[*She races out of the front door.*]

MRS. BRAMSON : Running around the house shouting like a lunatic ! Sensation mad ! Silly woman !

[*DORA runs in from kitchen.*]

DORA : They've got it in the papers !

MRS. BRAMSON : Go away !

MRS. TERENCE (*off*) : I've bought three !

MRS. BRAMSON (*shouting*) : Be QUIET !

[*MRS. TERENCE runs back with three Sunday newspapers and gives one to OLIVIA and one to MRS. BRAMSON.*]

OLIVIA (*sitting left of the table*) : I expect it is a bit of an event.

MRS. TERENCE (*leaning over the table, searching in her paper*) : 'E says they're sellin' like nine-pins—

MRS. BRAMSON (*turning pages over, impatiently*) : Where is it ? . . .

MRS. TERENCE : Oh, I expect it's nothink after all. . . .

OLIVIA : Here it is. . . . (Reading) " Disappeared mysteriously . . . woods round the village being searched " . . . then her description . . . tall . . . blonde. . . .

MRS TERENCE Blonde ? I should think she is.
I can't find it !

OLIVIA Here's something . . . " A keeper in the Shepperley woods was closely questioned late last night, but he had heard nothing, beyond a woman's voice in the woods on the afternoon in question, and a man's voice, probably with her, singing ' Mighty Lak a Rose ' Enquiries are being pursued. . . "

MRS BRAMSON . " Mighty Lak a Rose " What rubbish !

MRS TERENCE : Oh yes . . . It's the 'eadline in this one (*Humming the tune absently as she reads*) ' Don't know what to call you, but you're mighty lak a rose " . . . Those men have done rummaging in the garden, anyway

MRS BRAMSON . I must go this minute and have a look at my pampas grass And if they've damaged it I'll bring an action.

MRS TERENCE : Iancy Shepperley bein' in print—

MRS BRAMSON : Wheel me out, and don't talk so much.

MRS TERENCE (*manœuvring her through the front door*) I could talk me 'ead off and not talk as much as some people I could mention

[OLIVIA is alone A pause She spreads her paper on the table and finds DAN's hat under it She picks it up and looks at it , DAN comes in from the kitchen with a ball of tangled string, a cigarette between his lips He is about to take the books into the kitchen, when he sees her He crosses to her

DAN Excuse me . . . (*Taking the hat from her, cheerfully*) I think I'll hang it in the hall, same as if I was a visitor. . . .

~~He~~ He does so, then takes up the books, sits on the sofa, and begins to unravel the string. A pause.

You don't mind me stayin' and havin' a bit o' lunch . . . in the kitchen, do you ?

OLIVIA : It's not for me to say. As I told you before, I'm really a servant here.

DAN (after a pause) : You're not a very ordinary servant, though, are you ?

OLIVIA (turning over a page) : N-no. . . .

DAN : Neither am I.

[He unpicks a knot, and begins to hum absent-mindedly. The humming gradually resolves itself into faint singing.]

(Singing) " I'm a pretty little feller . . . everybody knows . . . "

[OLIVIA looks up ; a thought crosses her mind. She turns her head and looks at him.]

The Curtain begins to fall slowly.

(Singing, as he intently unravels the string) " Don't know what to call me—but I'm mighty lak a rose. . . . "

THE CURTAIN IS DOWN

ACT II

SCENE I

In afternoon twelve days later The weather is a little duller

MRS BRAMSON is sitting in the right of the table in her invalid chair, puzzling out a game of patience. She has smartened up her appearance in the interval and is wearing purple, and earrings. OLIVIA is sitting opposite her, smoking a cigarette, a pencil and pad on the table in front of her, she is pondering and writing. A portable gramophone on a small table next the desk is playing the H M V dance record of "Fames"

I pause MRS BRAMSON coughs. She coughs again, and looks at OLIVIA, waving her hand before her, clearing away billows of imaginary smoke

OLIVIA I'm sorry Is my cigarette worrying you?

MRS BRAMSON *leny r,* Not at all I like it

OLIVIA stabs out her cigarette with a resigned look and goes on making notes. DAN enters from the back door keeping time to the music, carrying a bunch of roses, wearing overalls over flannel trousers and a brown golf jacket, and smoking. He goes to the fire-place and limps the roses into a vase on the mantel-piece humming the tune. He crosses to the gramophone, still in rhythm, Mrs BRAMSON keeping time stiffly with her hands. He turns off the gramophone and looks over OLIVIA's shoulder at what she is writing

DAN (*singing*) "Their home addresses . . . and their caresses . . . linger in my memory of those beautiful dimes" (*His hand to his forehead*) That's me!

OLIVIA looks at him coldly and continues her notes

MRS BRAMSON : It won't come out. .

[DAN shrugs his shoulders, stands behind MRS. BRAMSON'S chair, and studies her play. OLIVIA follows his example from her side.

OLIVIA (*pointing to two cards*) : Look.

MRS. BRAMSON (*infuriated*) I saw that ! Leave me alone, and don't interfere.

[A pause DAN makes a quick movement and puts one card on another.

(*Pleased and interested, quite unconscious to the difference in her attitude*) Oh, yes, dear, of course . .

OLIVIA (*as MRS. BRAMSON makes a move*) : No, that's a spade.

MRS. BRAMSON (*sharply*) . No such thing , it's a club It's got a wiggle on it.

DAN . They both got wiggles on 'em. (*Pointing to another card*) This is a club

MRS. BRAMSON : Oh yes, dear, so it is !

OLIVIA (*writing*) The nonmonger says there were two extra gallons of paraffin not paid for

MRS. BRAMSON : And they won't be paid for either—not if I have to go to law about it.

[A pause. She coughs absently.

DAN : I'm sorry. Is my cigarette worrying you ?

MRS. BRAMSON . No, no, dear.

[This has its effect on OLIVIA DAN sits on the left of the table, where "East Lynne" is open on the table.

I'm sick of patience.

DAN (*reading laboriously*) " You old-fashioned child——"

MRS. BRAMSON . What ?

DAN : East Lynne.

MRS. BRAMSON Oh. . . .

DAN (*reading*) : “ ‘ You old-fashioned child ! ’
retorted Mrs. Vane. ‘ Why did you not put on
your diamonds ? ’ ‘ I—did—put on my dia-
monds,’ stay-mered Lady Isabel. ‘ But I—took
them off again.’ ‘ What on earth for ? ’ ” That’s
the other lady speaking there—

MRS. BRAMSON : Yes, dear. . . .

DAN : “ ‘ What on earth for ? ’ . . . ‘ I did not
like to be too fine,’ answered Lady Isabel, with
a laugh—” (*turning over*) “—and a blush. ‘ They
glittered so ! I feared it might be thought I had
put them on to look fine.’ ”

MRS. BRAMSON (*absently*) : Good, isn’t it ?

DAN (*flucking ash*) : Oh, yes, realistic. . . . (*Read-
ing*) “ ‘ I see you mean to set up among that
class of people who pre-tend to dee-spise
orniment,’ scornfully ree-marked Mrs Vane.
‘ It is the ree-finement of aff-affectation, Lady
Isabel—’ ”

[*An excited knock at the kitchen door DORA enters.
DAN turns back the page and surveys what he has
been reading, scratching his head.*

MRS. BRAMSON (*the old edge to her voice*) : What
is it ?

DORA : Them men’s in the wood again.

MRS. BRAMSON : What men ?

DORA : The men lookin’ for that Mrs. Chalfont.

[*A pause. DAN hums “ Dames ” under his breath*

MRS. BRAMSON : You don’t mean to tell me
they’re still at it ? But they’ve been pottering
about since . . . when was that day Mr. Dan
left the Tallboys ?

DORA (*stressing a little bitterly*) : Mister Dan ?

DAN (*smiling*) : Ahem ! . . .

DORA : Mister Dan first came to work for you,
didn’t he, a week last Monday. . . .

MRS. BRAMSON : Well, I think it’s a disgrace—

DORA : I've found something !

[DAN's humming stops abruptly ; he swivels round and looks at DORA, his face unseen by the audience
OLIVIA and MRS. BRAMSON stare at DORA ; a pause.

MRS. BRAMSON : You've found something ?

OLIVIA : What ?

DORA (excited) This !

[She holds out her left arm and lets fall from her fist the length of a soiled belt A pause OLIVIA puts down her pencil and pad, goes to her, and looks at the belt.

OLIVIA : Yes, of course, it's mine ! I missed it last week . . .

MRS. BRAMSON (balked of excitement) Oh yrs, I thought I recognised it . . . What nonsense !

[DAN looks at her, chuckling.

DORA (going, dolefully) . I'm ever so disappointed . . .

[She goes into the kitchen OLIVIA goes to the arm-chair by the fireplace.

MRS. BRAMSON . She'll be joining Scotland Yard next. . . . Go on, dear.

DAN (reading) : " ' It is the ree-finement of affectation, Lady Isabel——' "

[The clock chimes.

(Clapping his hands, to MRS BRAMSON) Ah !

MRS. BRAMSON (pleased) Oh, Danny . .

[He hurries to the medicine cupboard and pours medicine into a spoon. HUBERT comes in from the front door

HUBERT (eagerly) : Have you heard ?

MRS. BRAMSON (eagerly) What ?

HUBERT : Dora's found a belt !

MRS. BRAMSON (disappointed again) : Oh . . was Olivia's.

HUBERT : I say, what a shame ! . . .

Mrs. BRAMSON : Tch, tch ! . . . All this sensation-mongering—

DAN drowns her speech by deftly pouring the spoonful of medicine down her throat. He pushes her chocolate-box towards her, and strides briskly into the hall.

Horrid . . .

DAN (taking a soft hat from the rack and putting it on) . Good for you, though, the way you are. . . .

Mrs BRAMSON : Yes, dear

DAN (coming into the room, and beginning to take off his overalls) And now it's time for your walk. . . . (Smiling at OLIVIA) It's all right, I got trousers on . . . (Peeling the overalls over his feet, and tossing them on to the left window-seat) Listen to me talking about your walk when you'll be in a chair all the time . . . (Chuckling, to HUBERT) That's funny, isn't it ! . . . (Going to Mrs. BRAMSON) Come on, I got your shawl and your rug in the hall . . .

Mrs BRAMSON (as he wheels her into the hall) : Have you got my pills ?

DAN I got them in my pocket.

Mrs BRAMSON . And my chocolates ?

DAN . I got them in my pocket too. Here's your hat—better put it on yourself.

Mrs BRAMSON : Yes, dear.

DAN . And here's your shawl.

Mrs BRAMSON . It isn't a shawl, it's a cape.

DAN Well, I don't know, do I ? And I carry your rug on my shoulder. . . . (To the others) See you later ! Be good !

[Shutting the front door, his voice dying as the chair passes the left window.

Down this way to-day. . . .

[A pause. HUBERT and OLIVIA look at each other.

OLIVIA (*suddenly*) : What do *you* think of him ?

HUBERT (*a little taken aback*) : Him ? Grannie's, white-headed boy, you mean ? Oh, he's all right. (*Heavily*). A bit slow in the uptake, of course. I wish he'd occasionally take that fag-end out of his mouth.

OLIVIA : He does. For *her*

HUBERT That's true That's why he's made such a hit with her Funny I haven't been able to manage it. In two weeks, too . . . it's uncanny.

OLIVIA Uncanny ? . I think it's clever

HUBERT . You don't think he's a wrong 'un, do you ?

OLIVIA What do we know about him ?

HUBERT Why . . . his Christian name—

OLIVIA And that's all

HUBERT He looks pretty honest.

OLIVIA : Looks ? (*After a pause*) It's rather frightening to think what a face can hide. . I sometimes catch sight of one looking at me Careful lips, and blank eyes. . . . And then I find I'm staring at myself in the glass . . . and I realise how successfully I'm hiding the thoughts I know so well . . . and then I know we're all . . . strangers. Windows, with blinds and behind them secrets What's behind *my* eyes ? (*After a pause, with a smile*) You're quite right, it is morbid.

HUBERT : D'you think he's a thief or something ? By Jove, I left my links on the wash stand before lunch—

OLIVIA : He's acting . . . every minute of the time. I know he is ! But he's acting pretty well because I don't know *how* I know. . . . He's walking about here all day, and talking a *little*, and smiling, and smoking cigarettes. . . . *Irre-*penetrable . . . that's what it is ! What's

going on—in his mind? What's he thinking of?
(*Vehemently*) He is thinking of something! All
the time! What is it?

[DAN enters from the front door and smiles broadly
at them.

DAN: Anybody seen my lady's pills? It's a
matter of life and death. . . . I thought I had
em

[HUBERT chuckles.

OLIVIA (*after a pause, in a level voice*): Oh, yes.
They're in the top drawer of the desk. I'm so
sorry

DAN: Thank you.

[*He salutes her, goes to the desk, and takes out the
pills. They watch him.*

MRS. BRAMSON (*off*): Danny!

DAN: Oh, yes, here they are . . .

HUBERT (*to say something*): Is she feeling off
colour again?

DAN (*on his way to the front door*): Off colour?
She's never been on it, man! To hear her go
on you'd think the only thing left is artificial
respiration. And chocolates . . . (*Laughing, and
calling*) Coming!

[*He goes, shutting the front door behind him.*

HUBERT: No, really you have to laugh!

OLIVIA: But what you've just seen . . . that's
exactly what I mean! It's acting! He's not
being himself for a minute— it's all put on for
our benefit . . . don't you see?

HUBERT (*banteringly*): D'you know, I think
you're in love with him.

OLIVIA (*with rather more impatience than is neces-
sary*): Don't be ridiculous.

HUBERT: I was only joking.

OLIVIA: He's common and insolent, and I dis-
like him intensely.

[MRS. TERENCE comes in from the kitchen.

MRS. TERENCE : What'll you 'ave for tea, scones or crumpets ? Can't make both.

OLIVIA : What d'you think of Dan ?

MRS. TERENCE : Dan ? Oh, 'e's all right. Bit of mystery.

HUBERT : Oh.

MRS. TERENCE (*shutting the kitchen door and coming into the middle of the room*) : Terrible liar o' course. But then a lot of us are. Told me he used to 'unt to 'ounds and 'ave 'is own pack. Before 'e went up in the world and went as a page-boy, I suppose.

OLIVIA (*to HUBERT*) : You see ? He wouldn't try that on with us, but couldn't resist it with her.

HUBERT : I wonder how soon the old girl'll get his number ? . . . Oh, but fair play, we're talking about the chap as if he were the most terrible——

MRS. TERENCE : Why, what's 'e done ?

HUBERT : Exactly.

OLIVIA : I don't know, but I feel so strongly . Is Dora there ? . . . (*Calling cautiously*) Dora !

MRS. TERENCE : Oh, she won't know anything. She's as 'alf-witted as she's lazy, and that's sayin' a lot. She'd cut 'er nose off to stop the dust-bin smelling sooner than empty it, she would.

[DORA comes in from the kitchen, wiping her hands on her apron.

DORA : Did somebody say Dora ?

OLIVIA : Has Dan said any more about marrying you ?

DORA : No. *She* 'asn't brought it up again, either.

OLIVIA : Does he talk to you at all ?

RA (*perplexed*) · Oh . . . only how-do-you-do
beg-your-pardon. I've never really spent
time in 'is company, you see. Except, o'
—

BERT : Quite. What's your idea of him ?

RA Oh . . . (*Moving to the centre of the room*)
, all right. 'Takes 'is fun where 'e finds it.
leaves it . . . Cracks 'imself up, you know.
tends 'e doesn't care a twopenny, but always
'is eye on what you're thinking of 'im . . . if
I know what I mean.

IVIA : Yes, I do. That incredible vanity . . .
y always have it. Always.

BERT : Who ?

A pause.

IVIA : Murderers

A pause. They stare at her.

BERT : Good God ! . . .

S TERENCE : D'you mean . . . this woman
y're looking for ?

IVIA : I'm sure of it.

S TERENCE : But 'e's such a—such a ordinary
—

IVIA · That's just it and then he's suddenly
. . . extraordinary. I've felt it ever since I
ard him sing that song—I told you——

BERT : That "mighty-lak-a-rose" thing,
I mean ? Oh, but it's a pretty well-known
; —

IVIA : It's more than that. I've kept on saying
myself : No, murder's a thing we read about
the papers ; it isn't real life ; it can't touch
. . . But it can. And it's here. All round us.
the forest . . . in this house. We're . . . living
h it. (*After a pause, rising decisively*) Bring his
Eage in here, will you, Mrs. Terence ?

—

MRS. TERENCE (*staggered*) : 'Is luggage ? (*Ru covering, to DORA*) Give me a 'and.

[*Wide-eyed, she goes into the kitchen, followed by DORA.*]

HUBERT : I say, this is a bit thick, you know, spying——

OLIVIA (*urgently*) . We may never have the house to ourselves again.

[*She runs to each window and looks out across the forest. MRS. TERENCE returns carrying luggage, one large and one small suitcase.*]

DORA follows, lugging an old-fashioned leather hat-box.

MRS. TERENCE places the suitcases on the table. DORA plants the hat-box in the middle of the floor.

MRS. TERENCE (*in a conspiratorial tone*) : This all.

HUBERT : But look here, we can't do this——

[OLIVIA snaps open the lid of the larger suitcase with a jerk.]

[*A pause. They look, almost afraid. DORA moves to the back of the table.*]

MRS. TERENCE (*as OLIVIA lifts it gingerly*) : A dirty shirt . . .

HUBERT : That's all right.

OLIVIA : A clean pair of socks . . . packets razor-blades . . .

HUBERT : We shouldn't be doing this—I feel as if I were at school again——

MRS. TERENCE : Singlet . . .

OLIVIA : Half ticket to Shepperley Palais, Danse . . .

MRS. TERENCE : Oh, it's a proper 'aunt !

DORA : Oh, 'ere's a pocket-book. With a letter (*She gives the letter to MRS. TERENCE and the pocket-book to OLIVIA.*)

HUBERT : Look here, this is going a bit too far—
you can't do this to a chap—

MRS. TERENCE (*taking the letter from the envelope*) :
Don't be silly, dear, your wife'll do it to
you 'undreds of times . . . (*Sniffing the notepaper*)
'ooh . . . (*Reading, as they crane over her shoulder*)
"Dear Baby-Face my own . . ." Signed Lil . .

LILIA : What awful writing . . .

MRS. TERENCE (*reading, heavily*) : "... Next time
you strike Newcastle, O K. by me, baby. . ."
'oh !

HUBERT : Just another servant-girl Sorry,
Dora .

DORA (*lugubrously*) : O K

LILIA (*rummaging in the pocket-book*) : Bus ticket
to Thorburton, some snaps . . .

MRS. TERENCE : Look at 'er bust !

LILIA : Here's a group . . . Look, Hubert. . .

[HUBERT joins her in front of the table.

HUBERT : This wench is rather fetching

MRS. TERENCE (*crouching between them*) : Look
at 'er ! . . . The impudence, 'er being taken in a
bathing-suit ! . .

DORA : He's not in this one, is 'e ?

HUBERT (*impressed*) : Oh, I saw . . . there she is !

MRS. TERENCE }
DORA } Who ?

HUBERT : The missing female ! In front of the
tall man . . . You remember the photograph of
her in the *Mirror* ?

DORA : It's awful to think she may be dead.
'wful . . .

MRS. TERENCE : Looks ever so sexy, doesn't she ?

DORA : 'Ere's one of a little boy

LILIA : How extraordinary . . .

HUBERT : What ?

OLIVIA : It's himself.

DORA : The little Eton collar. . . . Oh, dear .
ever so sweet, isn't it ?

MRS. TERENCE : Now that's what I call a real
innocent face. . . .

HUBERT (*going to the centre of the room*) : Well,
that's that. . . .

OLIVIA : Wait a minute, wasn't there another
one ? (*Seeing the hat-box*) Oh, yes . . .

HUBERT (*lifting it on to a chair*) Oh, this .
yes. . . .

DORA : Old-fashioned isn't it ?

MRS. TERENCE : I should think he got it from a
box-room at the Tallboys—

OLIVIA (*puzzled*) But it looks so extraor-
dinary— (*She gives a sudden gasp.*)

[*They look at her. She is staring at the box.*
A pause.

HUBERT : What is it ?

OLIVIA : I don't know. Suppose there is
something . . . inside it ?

[*A pause. They stare at her, fascinated by her
thought. The front door bangs. They are electrified
into action - but it is too late. It is DAN.*

He goes briskly to the table.

DAN : She wants to sit in the sun now and have a
bit of *East Lynne*. Talk about changin' your
mind—

[*He sees the suitcases on the table before him, and is
motionless and silent. A pause. The others dare not
move. He finally breaks the situation, takes up
"East Lynne" from the table, and walks slowly
back to the front door. He stops, looks round at
HUBERT, smiles, and comes down to him. His
manner is normal—too normal.*

ould I have it back, please ? It's the only one got. . .

HUBERT Oh . . . yes, of course. . . (*Handing in the pocket-book*)

DAN (*taking it*) Thank you very much

HUBERT Not at all . . . I . . . (*To OLIVIA*) Here, you deal with this. It's beyond me

DAN (*to him*) Did you see the picture of me when I was a little fellow ?

HUBERT . Yes. . . . Very jolly.

DAN (*turning to MRS TERENCE*) Did you ? It was in the inside of my wallet

MRS TERENCE : Oh . . . was it ?

DAN Yes Where I should be keeping my money, only any bit of money I have I always keep on me. (*Turning to HUBERT*) Safer, don't you think ?

HUBERT (*smiling weakly*) . Ye-es. . . .

DAN . I only keep one ten-bob note in this wallet, for emergencies . . . (*Looking*) That's mine It's gone.

[*He looks at HUBERT. The others look blankly at one another.*]

I expect I dropped it somewhere. . . . What do you think of the letter ?

HUBERT : Letter ?

DAN You got in your hand.

HUBERT : Well, I didn't—er—

DAN . Means well, does Lil ; but we had a row (*Taking back the letter*) She would spy on me And if there's anythin' I hate, it's spyin'. Don't you agree ?

HUBERT : Ye-es.

DAN : I'd sooner have anythin' than a spy
(To MRS. TERENCE) Bar a murderer, o' course.

[A pause He is arranging his property in his wallet

HUBERT (*incredulous*) : What—what did you say ?

DAN (*turning to him, casually*) Bar a murderer, o' course.

[OLIVIA steps forward MRS. TERENCE steps back from the chair on which the hat-box has been placed

OLIVIA (*incisively*) : Talking of murder, do you know anything about Mrs. Chalfont's whereabouts at the moment ?

[DAN turns to her, and for the first time sees the hat box. He stands motionless A pause.

DAN : Mrs. Who ?

OLIVIA . You can't pretend you've never heard of her.

DAN (*turning to HUBERT, recovering himself*) : Oh Mrs. Chalfont's whereabouts ! I thought she said her name was Mrs. Chalfontswear (*Profusely Silly* . . . Swear—about—couldn't think—

OLIVIA . Well ?

DAN (*still looking at HUBERT, brightly, after a pause*) I've nothin' to go on, but I think she been . . . murdered

HUBERT : Oh, you do ?

DAN : Yes, I do.

MRS. TERENCE . Who by ?

DAN : They say she had several chaps on a string, and— (*Suddenly*) There was one fellow a London chap, a bachelor, very citified—with a fair moust— (*He stares at HUBERT.*)

HUBERT (*touching his moustache, unconsciously*) What are you looking at me for ?

DAN Well . . . you wasn't round these parts the day she bunked, was you ?

HUBERT : Yes, I was, as a matter of fact.

DAN (*significantly*) : Oh. . . .

MRS BRAMSON'S VOICE (*calling in the garden*) :
Danny !

HUBERT (*flustered*) . What in God's name are you getting at ?

[DAN smiles and shrugs his shoulders regretfully at him, and goes out through the front door OLIVIA sits at the table

MRS TERENCE (*to HUBERT, perplexed*) . Are you sure you didn't do it, sir ?

HUBERT : I'm going out for a breath of air

[He takes his hat and stick as he goes through the hall, and goes out through the front door

MRS TERENCE (*to OLIVIA*) You don't still think—

OLIVIA I won't say any more I know how silly it sounds

[DORA runs into the kitchen, snuffling

MRS TERENCE (*to OLIVIA*) The way you looked us all up ! Doesn't it all go to show—

[She hears DAN return, and looks round apprehensively. He goes to the table slowly and looks at the two suitcases.

DAN (*smiling, to MRS. TERENCE*) Would you mind please givin' me a hand with the tidying up . . . (*Taking up the suitcases*) And carryin' the other one ? . . . (*Going into the kitchen, followed by MRS. TERENCE carrying the hat-box*) Looks as if it's goin' on our holidays, doesn't it ? .

[OLIVIA is alone for a moment. She stares before her, perplexed. DAN returns. She looks at him. He looks at her, his eyes narrowed. A pause. Studying her, he

~~takes~~ from a pocket of his jacket a formidable-looking clasp-knife, unclasps it, and tests the blade casually with his fingers. He glances at the mantelpiece, crosses to it, takes down a stick, and begins to sharpen the end of it OLIVIA watches him A pause.

OLIVIA : Did you do it ?

[He whittles at the stick.

DAN . You wouldn't be bad-lookin' without them glasses.

OLIVIA : It doesn't interest me very much what I look like.

DAN : Don't you believe it. . . (Surveying the shavings in the hearth) Tch ! . . . Clumsy . (Looking round, and seeing a newspaper lying on the table) Ah . . .

[He crosses to the table

(Smiling, with the suspicion of a mock-bow) Excuse me . (He unfolds the newspaper on the table and begins to whittle the stick over it)

OLIVIA : You're very conceited, aren't you ?

DAN (reassuringly) . Yes . . .

OLIVIA And you *are* acting all the time, aren't you ?

DAN (staring at her, as if astonished) : Actin' Actin' what ? (Leaning over the table, on both arms) Look at the way I can look you in the eye I'll stare you out . . .

OLIVIA (staring into his eyes) : I have a theory, the criminals who *can* look you in the eyes, and the honest people who blush and look away

DAN (smiling) : Oh. . .

OLIVIA (after a pause, challenging) : It's a very blank look, though, isn't it ?

DAN (smiling) : Is it ?

OLIVIA : You *are* acting, aren't you ?

DAN (*after a pause, in a whisper, almost joyfully*) .
Yes !

OLIVIA (*fascinated*) And what are you like
when you stop acting ?

DAN I dunno it's so long since I stopped.

OLIVIA But when you're alone ?

DAN Then I act more than ever I do

OLIVIA Why ?

DAN I dunno , 'cause I like it (*Breaking
the scene, pulling a chair round to the table*) Now
what d'ye say if I ask a question or two for a
change ? (*Sitting in the chair, facing her*) Just for
a change . Why can't you take a bit of an
interest in some other body but me ?

OLIVIA (*taken aback*) I'm not interested in you
Only you don't talk . That's bound to make
people wonder

DAN I can talk a lot sometimes . A drop o'
humour makes a power o' difference to me
(*Chuckles*) You'd be surprised . Ah

[He returns to his work]

OLIVIA I wonder if I would .

DAN I know you would .

OLIVIA I think I can diagnose you all right

DAN Carry on .

OLIVIA You haven't any feelings . . . at all . . .

[He looks slowly up at her . She has struck home]

But you live in a world of your own . . . A
world of your own imagination .

DAN I don't understand so very well, not
being so very liter-er-ary

OLIVIA You follow me perfectly well

*[He shrugs his shoulders laughs, and goes on
whistling]*

DAN : D'you still think there's been a bit o' dirty work ?

OLIVIA : I don't know what to think now. I suppose not.

DAN (*intent on his work, his back to the audience*) : Disappointed ?

OLIVIA : What on earth do you mean ?

DAN : Disappointed ?

OLIVIA (*laughing, in spite of herself*) : Yes, I suppose I am.

DAN : Why ?

OLIVIA (*the tension at last relaxed*) : Oh, I don't know. . . . Because nothing much has ever happened to me, and it's a dull day, and it's the depths of the country. . . . I don't know. . . .

[*A piercing scream from the bottom of the garden*
A pause.

MRS. BRAMSON (*shrieking from the other side of the house*) : Danny ! . . . Danny !

[*The clatter of footsteps in the garden. DORA runs in from the hall, breathless and terrified.*

DORA : They're diggin' . . . in the rubbish-pit . . .

OLIVIA : Well ?

DORA : There's something sticking out. . . .

OLIVIA : What ?

DORA : A hand . . . Somebody's hand ! . . . Oh Miss Grayne . . . somebody's hand. . . .

[*She runs whimpering into the kitchen, as OLIVIA rises and runs to the left window and looks out.*

MRS. BRAMSON'S VOICE (*calling, off*) : Danny !

[*DAN rises slowly, his back to the audience. OLIVIA*

turns and suddenly sees him. Horror grows in her face

The blare of music. The lights dim out.

SCENE II

The music plays in darkness for a few bars, then the curtain rises again. The music fades away.

Late afternoon, two days later. OLIVIA is seated above the table snipping long cuttings from newspapers and pasting them into a ledger. A knock at the front door. She starts nervously. Another knock. MRS. TERENCE comes in from the kitchen carrying a smoothing-iron.

MRS. TERENCE : If it's them police again, I'll ash their helmets in with this. If it lands me tree months, I will.

OLIVIA : They're from Scotland Yard, and they on't wear helmets.

MRS. TERENCE : Then they're going to get art. . . . (*Going into the hall*) I can tell by their ooks what they think. And they better not ink it, neither.

OLIVIA : And what do they think ?

MRS. TERENCE (*over her shoulder*) : They think 's me. I know they think it's me.

[*She goes into the hall and opens the front door.*

HUBERT (*outside*) : Good afternoon, Mrs. TERENCE.

MRS. TERENCE : Oh . . . come in, sir. (*Coming back into the room*) It's a civilian for a change.

[*She is followed by HUBERT.*

HUBERT (to OLIVIA) : I say, this is all getting pretty terrible, isn't it ?

OLIVIA : Yes, terrible.

MRS. TERENCE : Oh, terrible, terrible. There's one word for it ; it's terrible. Forty-eight hours since they found 'er. They'll never get 'im now.

HUBERT : Terrible. . . .

MRS. TERENCE : There was another charabanc load just after two o'clock. All standin' round the rubbish-'eap eatin' sandwiches. Sensation, that's what it is.

OLIVIA : Would you like some food, Hubert ?

HUBERT : Well, I—

MRS. TERENCE : They're still looking for the 'ead.

HUBERT (to OLIVIA, with a slight grimace) : No, thanks. I had lunch.

MRS. TERENCE : Mangled, she was, mangled. . . Did you see your name in the *Express*, sir ?

HUBERT : I—er—did catch a glimpse of it, yes.

MRS. TERENCE : Little did you think, sir, when you was digging that pit for my rubbish, eh ? 'E may 'ave been *watchin'* you digging it . . . ooh ! I have to sit in my kitchen and think about it.

HUBERT : Then why don't you leave ?

MRS. TERENCE (indignantly) : How can I leave, with the whole village waitin' on me to tell 'em the latest ? (*Going towards the kitchen*) I 'eard 'er 'ead must have been off at one stroke. One stroke. . . .

HUBERT : Really.

MRS. TERENCE (*turning at the door*) : She wasn't interfered with, though.

[*She goes into the kitchen.*]

HUBERT : How they all love it. . . . How's the lady bearing up in the old invalid chair, eh ?

MIVIA : She's bursting out of it with health. And loving it more than anybody. This is my best job—a press-cutting book. There was a picture of her in the *Chronicle* yesterday ; she bought twenty-six copies.

HUBERT (*taking his pipe out*) : She'll get to believe she did it herself in the end. . . . Is she in ?

MIVIA : She's gone over to Breakerly to interview a local paper.

HUBERT : The lad pushing the go-cart ? . . . He's the devoted son all right, isn't he ?

MIVIA (*after a pause*) : I don't talk to him much.

HUBERT : Nice fellow. I've thought a lot about that prying into his things pretty bad show, really, you know. (*Going to the left window*) I wonder if they'll ever nab him ?

MIVIA (*with a start*) . What do you mean ?

HUBERT : The fellow who did it. . . . Wonder what he's doing now.

MIVIA : I wonder

HUBERT : Damn clever job, you know, quietly. . . . That was a rum touch, finding that broken pestick in the rubbish-heap. . . . You know, the fact they still have no idea where this woman's head is——

MIVIA (*convulsively*) : Don't. . . .

HUBERT : Sorry.

MIVIA (*after a pause*) . It's a bit of a strain.

HUBERT (*earnestly*) : Then why don't you leave ?

MIVIA : I—I couldn't afford it.

HUBERT : But you *could*, if you married me ! Now, look here—— (*Going to her*) You said you'd tell me to-day. So here I am—er—popping the question again. There's nothing much to add,

except to go over the old ground again, and say that I'm not what you'd call a terribly brainy chap, but I am straight.

OLIVIA : Yes, I know.

HUBERT : Though, again, I'm not the sort that gets into corners with a pipe and never opens his mouth from one blessed year's end to the other. I can talk.

OLIVIA : Yes, you can.

HUBERT : An all-round chap, really—that's me.

OLIVIA : Yes.

HUBERT : Well ?

OLIVIA : I'm sorry, Hubert, but I can't.

HUBERT : You can't ? But you told me that day we might make a go of it, or words to that effect——

OLIVIA : I've thought it over since then, and I'm afraid I can't.

[*A pause.*]

HUBERT : What's changed you ?

OLIVIA : Nothing's changed me, Hubert. I've just thought the matter over, that's all.

[*A pause. He crosses towards the fireplace.*]

HUBERT : Is it another man ?

OLIVIA (*startled*) : Don't be silly. (*Collecting herself*) What man could I possibly meet, cooped up here ?

HUBERT : Sorry. Can't be helped. Sorry.

DAN (*in the garden*) : There we are.—Nice outing, eh——

OLIVIA : So am I.

[*The front door opens and DAN wheels in. MRS BRAMSON. He is as serene as ever, but more animated than before. He is dressed the same as in the previous scene, and is smoking his usual cigarette. HUBERT sits at the table.*]

AN (*hanging up her rug in the hall*) Back home
up.—I put your gloves away—

RS BRAMSON (*as he wheels her in*) . I feel dead.
(HUBERT) Oh, it's you. . . I feel dead

AN (*sitting beside her on the sofa, full of high
rits*) Don't you be a silly old 'oman, you
k as pretty as a picture—strawberries and
am in your face, and not a day over forty ,
d when I've made you a nice cup of tea
u'll be twenty-five in the sun and eighteen
th your back to the light, so you think your-
f lucky !

RS BRAMSON (*as he digs her in the side*) Oh,
inn, you are a terror ! (*To the others*) He's
en at me like this all the way. I must say it
ps me alive

AN (*as she hands him her hat and apr*) But you
l dead I get you

RS BRAMSON (*kittenish*) Oh, you caution !
u'll be the death of me !

N (*wagging his finger at her*) Ah-h-h ! (*Hang-
up her things in the hall*) Now what'd you like
drop of in your tea—gin, whisky, liqueur
andy, or a nice dollop of sailor's rum, eh ?

RS BRAMSON Just listen to him ! Now don't
ake me laugh, dear, because there's always
/ heart

AN (*sitting beside her again*) . You've lost your
urt, you know you have, to the little feller
at pushes your pram—you know you have !

RS BRAMSON (*laughing shrilly*) Pram ! Well !
er laugh cut short ! It's wicked to laugh, with
s—this thing all round us

AN (*sobering portentously*) I forgot (*As she
ters*) Not in a draught, are you ? (*Shutting the
ut door and coming down to HUBERT*) D'you
nember, Mr Laurie, me pulling your leg

about you havin' done it? Funniest thing out
... Talk about laugh!

MRS. BRAMSON (*fondly*): Tttt! . . .

DAN (*a glint of mischief in his eyes*): I think
better get the tea before I get into hot water.

[*He goes towards the kitchen.*]

OLIVIA: Mrs. Terence is getting the tea.

DAN (*at the door*): She don't make tea like me.
I'm an old sailor, Miss Grayne. Don't you
forget that.

[*He goes into the kitchen.*]

OLIVIA: I'm not interested, I'm afraid.

MRS. BRAMSON (*wheeling herself to the front of the
table*): Look here, Olivia, you're downright
rude to that boy, and if there's one thing that
never gets a woman anywhere, it's rudeness.
What have you got against him?

HUBERT: Surely he's got more to say to
himself to-day than when I met him before!

MRS. BRAMSON: Oh, he's been in rare spirit
all day.

HUBERT: Johnny Walker, judging by the whiff
of breath I got just now.

MRS. BRAMSON: Meaning whisky?

HUBERT: Yes.

OLIVIA: I've never heard you make a joke
before, Hubert.

HUBERT: Didn't realise it was one till I'd said
it. Sorry.

MRS. BRAMSON: It's not a joke; it's a libel.

[*A knock at the front door.*]

Come in.

[*NURSE LIBBY enters from the front door.*]

The boy's a teetotaller.

HUBERT: Sorry; my mistake.

NURSE : Good afternoon. Shall I wait for you in your bedroom?

MRS. BRAMSON : Yes I feel absolutely dead.

NURSE (*turning at the bedroom, eagerly*) : Anything new re the murder?

HUBERT : I believe her head was cut off at one stroke.

NURSE (*brightly*) : Oh, poor thing. . . .

[*She goes into the bedroom. DAN returns from the kitchen, carrying a tray of tea and cakes.*]

DAN : There you are, fresh as a daisy.—Three cups, as per usual, and some of the cakes you like—

MRS. BRAMSON (*as he pours out her tea*) : Thank you dear. . . . Let me smell your breath. (*After snuffing it*) Clean as a whistle. Smells of peppermints

OLIVIA : Yes. There were some in the kitchen.

HUBERT : Oh.

MRS. BRAMSON (*to HUBERT, as DAN pours out two more cups*) : So you won't stay to tea, Mr—
H —

HUBERT : Er— (*rising*)— no, thank you. . . .

[*DAN sits in HUBERT's chair.*]

I think I'll get off before it's dark. Good-bye, Mrs. Bramson. Good-bye, Mr.—er—

DAN (*grinning and saluting*) : Dan. Just Dan.

[*He opens the press-cutting ledger.*]

HUBERT (*to OLIVIA*) : Good-bye.

OLIVIA (*raises*) : Good-bye, Hubert. I'm sorry.

[*DAN raises his cup as if drinking a toast to MRS. BRAMSON. She follows suit.*]

HUBERT : Can't be helped. . . . It'll get dark early to-day, I think. Funny how the evenings draw in this time of year. Good night.

DAN : Good night.

HUBERT (to OLIVIA) : Good-bye.

OLIVIA : Good-bye.

[*She goes to the right window-seat.*]

MRS. BRAMSON : Johnny Walker, indeed !
Impertinence !

DAN (*drinking tea and scanning press-cuttings*)
Johnny Walker ?

MRS. BRAMSON : Never you mind, dear. .
Any more of those terrible people called ?
Reporters ? Police ?

DAN (*gaily*) : There's a defi-nite fallin' off in
attendance to-day. Sunday, I expect.

MRS. BRAMSON : Hush, don't talk like that,
dear.

DAN : Sorry, mum.

MRS. BRAMSON : And don't call me "mum" !

DAN : Well, if I can't call you Mrs. Bramson,
what can I call you ?

MRS. BRAMSON : If you were very good, I might
let you call me . . . mother !

DAN (*mischievously, his hand to his forehead*) . O.K.,
mother.

MRS. BRAMSON (*joining in his laughter*) : Oh, you
are in a mood to-day ! (*Suddenly, imperious*)
I want to be read to now.

DAN (*crossing to the desk, in mock resignation*)
Your servant, mother o' mine. . . . What'll you
have ? *The Channings ? The Red Court Farm ?*

MRS. BRAMSON : I'm tired of them.

DAN : Well . . . oh ! (*Taking a large Bible from
the top of the desk*) What about the Bible ?

MRS. BRAMSON : The Bible ?

DAN : It's Sunday, you know. I was brought up on it !

MRS. BRAMSON : So was I . . . *East Lynne's* nice, though.

DAN : Not as nice as the Bible.

MRS. BRAMSON (*doubtfully*) : All right, dear ; makes a nice change. . . . Not that I don't often dip into it.

DAN : I'm sure you do. (*Blowing the dust off the book*) Now where'll I read ?

MRS. BRAMSON (*unenthusiastic*) : At random's nice, don't you think, dear ?

DAN At random. . . . Yes. . . .

MRS BRAMSON : The Old Testament

DAN (*turning over leaves thoughtfully*) . At random in the Old Testament's a bit risky, don't you think so ?

[MRS. TERENCE comes in from the kitchen.

MRS TERENCE (to MRS. BRAMSON) : The paper-boy's at the back door and says you're in the *News of the World* again.

MRS. BRAMSON (*interested*) : Oh ! . . . (*Simulating indifference*) That horrible boy again, when the one thing I want is to blot the whole thing out of my mind.

MRS. TERENCE : 'Ow many copies d'you want ?

MRS. BRAMSON : Get three.

MRS. TERENCE : And 'e says there's a placard in Shepperley with your name on it.

MRS. BRAMSON : What does it say ?

MRS. TERENCE : " Mrs. Bramson Talks."

[*She goes back towards the kitchen.*

MRS. BRAMSON : Oh. (*As MRS. TERENCE reaches the kitchen door*) Go at once into Shepperley and order some. At once !

MRS. TERENCE : Can't be done.

MRS. BRAMSON : Can't be done ? What d'you mean, can't be done ? It's a scandal. What are you paid for ?

MRS. TERENCE (*coming back, furious*) : I'm not paid ! And 'aven't been for two weeks ! And I'm not coming to-morrow unless I am ! Put that in your copybook and blot it.

[*She goes back into the kitchen, banging the door*

MRS. BRAMSON : Isn't paid ? Is she mad ? (To OLIVIA) Are you mad ? Why don't you pay her ?

OLIVIA (*coming down*) Because you don't give me the money to do it with

MRS. BRAMSON : I—(*fumbling at her bodice*) wheel me over to that cupboard.

[OLIVIA is about to do so, when she catches DAN'S eye.

OLIVIA (*to DAN, pointedly*) Perhaps you'd go into the kitchen and get the paper from Mrs. Terence ?

DAN (*after a second's pause, with a laugh*) : Of course I will, madam ! Anythin' you say ! Anythin' you say !

[*He careers into the kitchen, still carrying the Bill*
MRS. BRAMSON has fished up two keys on the end of a long black tape. OLIVIA wheels her over to the cupboard above the fireplace.

OLIVIA : If you give me the key, I'll get it for you.

MRS. BRAMSON : No fear !

[*She unlocks the cupboard ; it turns out to be a small but very substantial safe*

(*Unlocking the safe, muttering to herself*) Won't go into Shepperley, indeed . . . never heard of such impertinence. . . .

[She takes out a cash-box from among some deeds, unlocks it with the smaller key, and takes out a mass of five-pound and pound notes]

THE WAY these servants—what are you staring at?

OLIVIA Isn't it rather a lot of money to have in the house?

MRS BRAMSON 'Put not your trust in banks'—my motto, and always will be

OLIVIA But that's hundreds of pounds!

MRS BRAMSON *(handing her two notes)* D'you wonder? I wouldn't let you have the key?

OLIVIA Has anybody else asked you for it?

MRS BRAMSON *(locking the cash-box and putting it up in the safe)* I wouldn't let a soul touch it—not a soul. Not even Danny.

[She snaps the safe, unlocks it, and slips the keys back into her bosom]

OLIVIA Has he asked you for it?

MRS BRAMSON It's enough to have those policemen prying you forward, girl, without—

OLIVIA *(urgently)* Please! Has he?

MRS BRAMSON Well, he did offer to fetch some money yesterday for the day. But I wouldn't give him the key! Oh, no!

OLIVIA Why?

MRS BRAMSON Do I want to see him waylaid and attacked, and my key stolen? Oh, no, I told him, that key stays on me—

OLIVIA Did he—know how much money there was in there?

MRS BRAMSON I told him! Do you wonder I stick to the key, I said—what is the matter with you, all these questions?

OLIVIA : Oh, it's no use—

[*She goes to the armchair below the fireplace and sits in it. DAN returns from the kitchen, with a copy of the "News of the World," the Bible tucked under his arm, a cigarette stub between his lips.*

DAN : He says they're sellin' like hot cakes !
(*Handing the paper to MRS. BRAMSON*) There you are, I've found the place for you—whole page, headlines an' all. . .

MRS. BRAMSON : Oh, yes. . . .

[*DAN stands with one knee on the sofa, and turns over the pages of his Bible.*

(*Reading breathlessly, her back to the fireplace*
" . . . The Victim's Past " . . . with another picture of me underneath " (*Looking closer, dashed*
Oh, taken at Tonbridge the year before the war really it isn't right. . . . (*To OLIVIA, savouring it*
" The Bungalow of Death ! . . . Grievous finds. . . Fiendish murderer still at large. .
The enigma of the missing head . . . where is he buried ? " Oh, yes ! (*She goes on reading silently to herself*)

DAN (*suddenly, in a clear voice*) " . . . Blessed is that man . . . that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly . . . nor standeth in the way of sinner . . . nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. .

MRS. BRAMSON (*impatiently*) : Oh, the print's too small . . .

DAN (*firmly*) . Shall I read it to you ?

MRS. BRAMSON : Yes, dear, do. . . .

[*He shuts the Bible with a bang, throws it on the sofa, and takes the paper from her. OLIVIA looks at him intently ; he smiles at her slowly and broadly as he shakes out the paper.*

DAN (*reading laboriously*) . " . . . The murderer committed the crime in the forest most—in the forest, most likely strippin' beforehand— "

(DORA comes in from the kitchen, and stands at the door, arrested by his reading. She is dressed in Sunday best)

(reading) " . . . and cleansin' himself afterwards in the forest lake— "

MRS BRAMSON : Tch ! tch !

DAN *(reading)* . " . . . He buried the body shallow in the open pit, cunnin'ly chancin' it bein' filled, which it was next day, the eleventh ——" *(Nodding at OLIVIA)* That was the day fore I come here. .

MRS BRAMSON So it was. . . .

DAN *(reading)* " The body was nude. Attempts had been made to . . . turn to foot of next column. . . ." *(Doing so)* " Attempts had been made to . . . eradicate fingerprints with a knife . . ." *(Far away, the tolling of village bells. Reading)* " . . . The head was severed by a skilled person, possibly a butcher. The murderer—" *(He stops suddenly, raises his head, smiles, takes the cigarette stub, puts it behind his ear, and listens)*

OLIVIA . What's the matter ?

MRS BRAMSON : Can you hear something ? Oh, I'm scared . . .

DAN . I forgot it was Sunday. . . . They're goin' to church in the villages. All got up in their Sunday best, with prayer-books, and the organ playin', and the windows shinin'. Shinin' on holy things, because holy things isn't afraid of the daylight.

MRS BRAMSON : But, Danny, what on earth are you —

DAN *(quelling her)* : But all the time the daylight's movin' over the floor, and by the end of the sermon the air in the church is turnin' black . . . And people isn't able to think of holy things so much no more, only of the terrible

things that's goin' on outside, that everybody's readin' about in the papers ! (*Looking at OLIVIA*) Because they know that though it's still daylight, and everythin's or'nary and quiet . . . to-day will be the same as all the other days, and com to an end, and it'll be night. . . . (*After a pause coming to earth again with a laugh at the others, throwing the newspaper on the sofa*) I forgot it was Sunday !

MRS. BRAMSON (*overruved*) : Good gracious . . . what's come over you, Danny ?

DAN (*with exaggerated animation*) : Oh, I speechify like anything when I'm roused ! I used to go to Sunday school, see, and the thoughts sort of come into my head. Like as if I was readin' off a book ! (*Slapping his Bible.*)

MRS. BRAMSON : Dear, dear. . . . You should have been a preacher. You should !

[*DAN laughs loudly and opens the Bible.*]

DORA (*going to the table and collecting the tea-tray*) : I never knew 'e 'ad so many words in 'is 'ead. . .

MRS. BRAMSON (*suddenly*) : I want to lie down now, and be examined.

DAN (*rising*) : Anything you say, mother o' mine. . . . Will you have your medicine in your room as well, eh ?

MRS. BRAMSON : Yes, dear. . . . Olivia, you never got a new bottle yesterday !

DAN (*as he wheels her into her bedroom*) : I got it to-day while you were with the chap. . . . Popped in at the chemist's.

MRS. BRAMSON : Oh, thank you, dear. The one by the mortuary ? . . . Oh, my back. . . . Nurse ! . . .

[*Her voice is lost in the bedroom. The daylight begins to fade. The church bells die away.*]

DORA : My sister says all this is wearin' me to a shadow.

OLIVIA : It is trying, isn't it ?

DORA : You look that worried, too, Miss Grayne.

OLIVIA : Do I ?

DORA : As if you was waiting for something to 'appen.

OLIVIA : Oh ?

DORA : Like an explosion. A bomb, or something.

OLIVIA (*smiling*) : I don't think that's very likely. . . . (*Lowering her voice*) Have you talked to Dan at all this week ?

DORA : Never get the chance. 'E's too busy dancin' attendance on Madame Crocodile. . . .

[DAN comes back from the bedroom, his cigarette stub between his lips.

(*going towards the kitchen*) I'm off. You don't catch me 'ere after dark.

DAN : Why, will ye be late for courting ?

DORA : If I was, they'd wait for me. Good afternoon, Miss Grayne. Good afternoon . . . sir.

DAN (*winking at Olivia*) : Are you sure they'd wait ?

DORA : You ought to know.

[*She goes into the kitchen.*

DAN and OLIVIA are alone. DAN crosses to the sofa with a laugh, humming gaily.

DAN : " Their home addresses . . . and their carriages . . . "

[*He sits on the end of the sofa.*

OLIVIA : You've been drinking, haven't you ?

DAN (*after a pause, quizzically*) : You don't miss much, do you ?

OLIVIA (*significantly*) : No.

DAN (*rubbing his hands*) : I've been drinking, and I feel fine ! . . . (*Brandishing the Bible*) You wouldn't like another dose of reading ?

OLIVIA : I prefer talking.

DAN (*putting down the Bible*) : Carry on.

OLIVIA : Asking questions.

DAN (*catching her eye*) : Carry on !

[*He studies his outspread hands.*]

OLIVIA (*crisply*) : Are you sure you were ever a sailor ? Are you sure you weren't a butcher ?

[*A pause. He looks at her, slowly, then breaks the look abruptly.*]

DAN (*rising with a smile and standing against the mantelpiece*) : Aw, talkin's daft ! *Doin's* the thing !

OLIVIA : You can talk too.

DAN : Aw, yes ! D'you hear me just now ? She's right, you know, I should ha' been a preacher. I remember, when I was a kid, sittin' in Sunday school—catching my mother's eye where she was sitting by the door, with the sea behind her, and she pointed to the pulpit, and then to me, as if to say, that's the place for you. . . . (*Far away, pensive*) I never forgot that.

[*A pause.*]

OLIVIA : I don't believe a word of it.

DAN : Neither do I, but it sounds wonderful (*Leaning over her, confidentially*) I never saw my mam, and I never had a dad, and the first thing I remember is . . . Cardiff Docks. And you're the first 'oman I ever told that, so you can compliment yourself. Or the drink. (*Laughing*) I think it's the drink.

OLIVIA : You *do* live in your imagination, don't you !

DAN (*reassuringly*) : Yes. . . . It's the only way to bear with the awful things you have to do.

OLIVIA : What awful things ?

DAN : Well . . . (*Grimacing like a child and going back to the sofa*) Ah-ha ! . . . I haven't had as much to drink as all that ! (*Sitting on the sofa*) Ah-ha ! . . .

OLIVIA : You haven't a very high opinion of women, have you ?

[DAN makes a gesture with his hands, pointing the thumbs downwards with a decisive movement.]

DAN : Women don't have to be drunk to talk. . . . You don't talk that much, though ; tau play. (*Looking her up and down, insolently*) You're a dark horse, you are.

[A pause. She rises abruptly and stands at the fireplace, her back to him. She takes off her spectacles.]

Ye know, this isn't the life for you. What is there to it ? Tell me that !

OLIVIA (*sombrely*) : What is there to it . . . ?

DAN : Yes. . .

OLIVIA : Getting up at seven, mending my stockings or washing them, having breakfast with a vixenish old woman and spending the rest of the day with her, in a dreary house in the middle of a wood, and going to bed at eleven . . . I'm plain, I haven't got any money, I'm shy, and I haven't got any friends.

DAN (*teasing*) : Don't you *like* the old lady ?

OLIVIA : I could kill her.

[A pause. She realises what she has said.]

DAN (*with a laugh*) : Oh, no, you couldn't ! . . . Not many people have it in them to kill people. . . . Oh, no !

[*She looks at him. A pause. He studies the palms of his hands, chuckling to himself.*]

OLIVIA : And what was there to *your* life at the Tallboys ?

DAN : My life ? Well . . . The day don't start so good, with a lot of stuck-up boots to clean, and a lot of silly high heels all along the passage waitin' for a polish, and a lot of spoons to clean that's been in the mouths of gapin' fools that looks through me as if I was a dirty window hadn't been cleaned for years. . . (*Throwing his stub into the fire in a sudden crescendo of fury*) Orders, orders, orders ; go here, do this, don't do that, you idiot, open the door for me, get a move on— I was never meant to take orders never ! . . . Down in the tea-place there's an old white beard wigglin'. "Waiter, my tea's stone cold" (*Urgently*) I'm not a waiter, I'm a millionaire, and everybody's under me ! . . . And just when I think I got a bit o' peace. . . (*His head in his hands*) . . . there's somebody lockin' the bedroom door . . . (*raising his head*) won't let me get out ; talk, talk, talk, won't fork out with no more money, at me, at me, at me won't put no clothes on, calls me everythin', lie on the floor and screams and screams, so nothin' keeps that mouth shut only . . . (*A pause.*) It's rainin' out of the window, and the leaves is off the trees . . . oh, Lord . . . I wish I could hear a bit o' music . . . (*smiling, slowly*) . . . And I do inside o' myself ! And I have a drop of drink and everything's fine ! (*Excited*) And when it's the night . . .

OLIVIA (*with a cry*) . Go on !

[*A pause. He realises she is there, and turns slowly and looks at her.*]

DAN (*wagging his finger with a sly smile*) : Ah ! I'm too fly for you ! You'd like to know, wouldn't you ? Aha ! Why would you like to

now ? (*Insistently, mischievously*) Why d'you lie awake . . . all night ?

LIVIA : Don't ! . . . I'm frightened of you ! . . .

DAN (*triumphantly, rising and facing her, his back half to the audience*) : Why ?

LIVIA (*desperate*) : How do you know I lie awake at night ? Shall I tell you why ? Because you're awake yourself ! You can't sleep, can you ? . . . (*Triumphantly, in her turn*) You can't *help* ! There's one thing that keeps you awake . . . isn't there ? One thing you've pushed into the back of your mind, and you can't do any more about it, and you never will. . . . And do you now what it is ? . . . It's a little thing A box. Only a box But it's . . . rather heavy . . .

[DAN looks at her A long pause. He jerks away with a laugh and sits at the sofa again

DAN (*quietly, prosaically*) : The way you was going through my letters the other day—that had to make me smile . . .

[His voice dies away Without warning, as if seeing something in his mind which makes him lose control, he shrieks loudly, clapping his hands over his eyes. Then is silent He recovers slowly and stares at her

[After a pause, in a measured voice) It's the only thing that keeps me awake, mind you ! The only thing ! (*Earnestly*) But I don't know what to do . . . You see, nothing worries me, nothing in the world, only . . . I don't like a pair of eyes staring at me . . . (*his voice trailing away*) . . . with me look in them I don't know what to do . . . I don't know . . .

[Without warning he bursts into tears. She sits beside him and seems almost about to put her arms about him. He feels she is there, looks into her eyes, grasps her arm, then pulls himself together abruptly.

(*King*) But it's the only thing ! I live by myself

. . . (*clapping his chest*) . . . inside here—and all the rest of you can go hang ! After I've made a use of you, though ! Nothing's going to stop me ! I feel fine ! I——

[BELSIZE crosses outside.

A sharp knock at the front door.

She half rises. He motions her to sit again.

(*With his old swagger*) All right ! Anybody's there, I'll deal with 'em —I'll manage myself all right ! You watch me !

[*He goes to the front door and opens it.*

BELSIZE (*at the door, jovially*) : Hello, Dan ! How's things ?

DAN (*letting him in and shutting the door*) : Not so bad. . . .

[*He brings BELSIZE into the room.*

BELSIZE (*as OLIVIA goes*) : Afternoon, Miss Grayne !

OLIVIA (*putting on her spectacles*) : How do you do . . .

[*She makes an effort to compose herself and hurries across to the sun-room*

BELSIZE's attitude is one of slightly exaggerated breeziness : DAN's is one of cheerful naïveté almost as limpid as on his first appearance.

BELSIZE : Bearing up, eh ?

DAN : Yes, sir, bearin' up, you know. . . .

BELSIZE : We haven't scared you all out of the house yet, I see !

DAN : No chance !

BELSIZE : All these blood-curdlers, eh ?

DAN : I should say so !

BELSIZE : No more news for me, I suppose ?

DAN : No chance !

BELSIZE : Ah . . . too bad ! Mind if I sit down ?

DAN (*pointing to the sofa*) : Well, this is the nearest you get to comfort in this house, sir.

BELSIZE : No, thanks, this'll do. . . . (*Sitting on a chair at the table, and indicating the cuttings*) I see you keep apace of the news.

DAN : I should say so ! They can't hardly wait for the latest on the case in this house, sir.

BELSIZE : Ah, well, it's only natural. . . . I got a bit of a funny feeling bottom of my spine myself crossing by the rubbish-heap.

DAN : Well, will you have a cigarette, sir ? . . . (*His hand to his jacket pocket*) Only a Woodbine- -

BELSIZE : No, thanks.

DAN (*after a pause*) : Would you like to see Mrs. Bramson, sir ?

BELSIZE : Oh, plenty of time. How's she bearing up ?

DAN : Well, it's been a bit of a shock for her, then finding the remains of the lady at the bottom of her garden, you know.

BELSIZE : The remains of the lady ! I wish you wouldn't talk like that. I've seen 'em.

DAN (*looking over his shoulder at the cuttings*) : Well, you see, I haven't.

BELSIZE : You know, I don't mind telling you, they reckon the fellow that did this job was a bloodstained clever chap.

DAN (*smiling*) : You don't say ?

BELSIZE (*casually*) : He was blackmailing her, you know.

DAN : Tch ! tch ! Was he ?

BELSIZE : Whoever he was.

DAN : She had a lot of fellows on a string, though, didn't she ?

BELSIZE (*guardedly*) That's true.

DAN : Though this one seems to have made a bit more sui than any of the others, don't he ?

BELSIZE . Yes (*Indicating the cuttings*) Regular film star. Made his name

DAN (*abstractedly*) If you *can* make your name without nobody knowin' what it is, o' course

BELSIZE (*slightly piqued*) : Yes, of course . . . But I don't reckon he's been as bright as all that

DAN (*after a slight pause*) . Oh, you don't ?

BELSIZE No ! They'll nab him in no time.

DAN Oh . . Mrs Bramson'll be that relieved And the whole country besides. . .

BELSIZE Look here, Dan, any self-respecting murderer would have taken care to mutilate the body to such a degree that nobody could recognise it—and here we come and identify it first go ! (*DAN folds his arms and looks thoughtful*) Call that clever ? . . . What d'you think ?

[DAN catches his eye and crosses to the sofa.

DAN . Well, sir, I'm a slow thinker, I am, but though it might be clever to leave the lady unidentified—unidentified—

BELSIZE Unidentified

DAN (*sitting on the edge of the sofa*) . Thank you, sir. . . . (*Laboriously*) Well, though it be clever to leave the lady unidentified and not be caught . . . hasn't it been more clever to leave her identified . . . and still not be caught ?

BELSIZE . Why didn't you sleep in your bed on the night of the tenth ?

[*A pause. DAN stiffens almost imperceptibly.*]

DAN : What you say ?

BELSIZE : Why didn't you sleep in your bed on the night of the murder ?

DAN : I did.

BELSIZE (*lighting his pipe*) : You didn't.

DAN : Yes I did. Oh—except for about half an hour—that's right. I couldn't sleep for toffee and I went up the fire-escape—I remember thinkin' about it next day when the woman was missing, and trying to remember if I could think of anything funny——

BELSIZE : What time was that ? (*He rises, crosses to the fireplace, and throws his match into it.*)

DAN : Oh, about . . . oh, you know how you wake up in the night and don't know what time it is. . . .

BELSIZE (*staring at him doubtfully*) : Mmm . . .

DAN : I could never sleep when I was at sea, neither, sir.

BELSIZE : Mmm. (*Suddenly*) Are you feeling hot ?

DAN : No.

BELSIZE : Your shirt's wet through.

DAN (*after a pause*) : I've been sawin' some wood.

BELSIZE : Why didn't you tell us you were having an affair with the deceased woman ?

DAN : Affair ? What's that ?

BELSIZE : Come along, old chap, I'll use a straighter word if it'll help you. But you're stalling. She was seen by two of the maids talking to you in the shrubbery. Well ?

[A pause. DAN bursts into tears, but with a difference. His breakdown a few minutes ago was genuine ; this is a good performance, very slightly exaggerated. BELSIZE watches him dispassionately his brows knit.

DAN : Oh, sir . . . it's been on my conscience . . . ever since . . .

BELSIZE : So you did have an affair with her ?

DAN : Oh, no, sir, not that ! I avoided her ever after that day she stopped me, sir ! . . . You see, sir, a lady stavin' where I was workin', and for all I knew married, and all the other fellers she'd been after, and the brazen way she went on at me. . . . You're only human, aren't you, sir, and when they asked me about her, I got frightened to tell about her stopping me. . . . But now you know about it, sir, it's a weight off my mind, you wouldn't believe ! . . . (*Rising after seeming to pull himself together*) As a matter of fact, sir, it was the disgust-like of nearly gettin' mixed up with her that was keepin' me awake at nights.

BELSIZE : I see. . . . You're a bit of a milk-sop, aren't you ?

DAN (*apparently puzzled*) : Am I, sir ?

BELSIZE : Yes. . . . That'll be all for to-day. I'll let you off this once.

DAN : I'm that relieved, sir !

BELSIZE (*crossing to the table for his hat*) : But don't try and keep things from the police another time.

DAN : No chance !

BELSIZE : They always find you out, you know

DAN : Yes, sir. Would you like a cup o' tea, sir ?

BELSIZE : No, thanks. I've got another inquiry in the village. . . . (*Turning back, with an after-thought*) Oh, just one thing—might as well just

do it, we're supposed to with all the chaps we're questioning, matter of form—if you don't mind, I'll have a quick look through your luggage. Matter of form. . . .

DAN : Oh, yes.

BELSIZE : Where d' you hang out ?

DAN (*tonelessly*) : Through the kitchen . . . here, sir. . . . First door facin' . . .

BELSIZE : First door facing—

DAN : You can't miss it.

BELSIZE : I'll find it.

DAN : It's open, I think.

[BELSIZE goes into the kitchen. A pause. DAN looks slowly round the room.

(*Turning mechanically to the kitchen door*) You can't miss it. . . .

[A pause. The noise of something being moved beyond the kitchen. DAN sits on the sofa with a jerk, looking before him. His fingers beat a rapid tattoo on the sides of the sofa. He looks at them, rises convulsively and walks round the room, grasping chairs and furniture as he goes round. He returns to the sofa, sits, and begins the tattoo again. With a sudden wild automatic movement he beats his closed fists in rapid succession against the sides of his head.

BELSIZE returns, carrying the hat-box.

BELSIZE (*crossing and placing the hat-box on the table*) : This one's locked. Have you got the key ?

[DAN rises, and takes a step into the middle of the room. He looks at the hat-box at last.

DAN (*in a dead voice*) : It isn't mine.

BELSIZE : Not yours ?

DAN : No.

BELSIZE : Oh ? . . . Whose is it, then ?

DAN : I dunno. It isn't mine.

[OLIVIA stands at the sun-room door.

OLIVIA : I'm sorry, I thought . . . Why, inspector, what are you doing with my box ?

BELSIZE : Yours ?

OLIVIA : Yes ! It's got all my letters in it !

BELSIZE : But it was in . . .

OLIVIA : Oh, Dan's room used to be the box-room.

BELSIZE : Oh, I see. . . .

OLIVIA : I'll keep it in my wardrobe ; it'll be safer there. . . .

[With sudden feverish resolution, she picks up the box and carries it into the kitchen. DAN looks the other way as she passes him.

BELSIZE : I'm very sorry, miss. (*Scratching his head*) I'm afraid I've offended her. . . .

DAN (*smiling*) : She'll be all right, sir. . . .

BELSIZE : Well, young feller, I'll be off. You might tell the old lady I popped in, and hope she's better.

DAN (*smiling and nodding*) : Thank you, sir. . . . Good day, sir.

BELSIZE : Good day.

[He goes out through the front door into the twilight, closing it behind him.

DAN : Good day, sir. . . .

[A pause. DAN crumbles to the floor in a dead faint.

QUICK CURTAIN

ACT III

SCENE I

Half an hour later. The light has waned ; the fire is lit and throws a red reflection into the room. DAN is lying on the sofa, eyes closed. NURSE LIBBY sits at the end of the sofa holding his pulse. MRS. TERENCE stands behind the sofa with a toby jug of water.

NURSE : There, lovey, you won't be long now.
. Ever so much steadier already . . . What a bit o' luck me blowin' in to-day ! . . . Tt ! tt !
Pouring with sweat, the lad is. Whatever's he been up to ?

MRS. TERENCE : When I walked in that door and saw 'im lyin' full stretch on that floor everything went topsy-wopsy. (*Pressing the jug to DAN's lips*) It did ! The room went round and round. . . .

NURSE (*as DAN splutters*) . Don't choke 'im, thec's a love. . . .

MRS. TERENCE : D'you know what I said to meself when I saw 'im lyin' there ?

NURSE : What ?

MRS. TERENCE : I said, "That murderer's been at 'im," I said, "and it's the next victim." I did !

NURSE : So you would ! Just like the pictures. . . . 'Old your 'ead up, love. . . .

MRS. TERENCE (*as NURSE LIBBY supports DAN's head*) : Got a nice face, 'asn't he ?

NURSE : Oh, yes ! . . . (*As DAN's eyes flicker*) Shh, he's coming to. . . .

[DAN opens his eyes and looks at her.

Welcome back to the land of the living !

MRS. TERENCE : Thought the murderer'd got you !

[A pause. DAN stares, then sits up abruptly.]

DAN : How long I been like that ?

NURSE : We picked you up ten minutes ago, and I'd say it was twenty minutes before that, roughly-like, that you passed away.

MRS. TERENCE : Passed away, don't frighten the boy ! . . . Whatever come over you, dear ?

DAN : I dunno. Felt sick, I think. (*Recovering himself*) Say no more about it, eh ? Don't like swinging the lead. . . . (*His head in his hand.*)

MRS. TERENCE : Waiting 'and and foot on Madame Crocodile, enough to wear King Kong out. . . .

NURSE : That's better, eh ?

DAN : Is it really getting dark ?

MRS. TERENCE : It's a scandal the way the days are drawin' in. . . . 'Ave another sip—

DAN (*as she makes to give him more water, to NURSE LIBBY*) : You haven't such a thing as a nip of brandy ?

NURSE (*opening her bag*) : Yes, lovey, I nearly gave you a drop just now—

[DAN takes a flask from her and gulps ; he takes a second mouthful. He gives it back, shakes himself, and looks before him.]

MRS. TERENCE : Better ?

DAN : Yes. . . . Clears the brain no end. . . . Makes you understand better. . . . (*His voice growing in vehemence*) Makes you see what a damn silly thing it is to get the wind up about anything. Do things ! Get a move on ! Show 'em what you're made of ! Get a move on ! . . . Fainting, indeed. . . . Proper girl's trick, I'm ashamed of myself. . . . (*Looking round, quietly*) The light's going. . . . The daytime's as if it's never been ; it's dead. . . . (*Seeing the others stare, with a laugh*) Daft, isn't it ?

[DORA brings in an oil lamp from the kitchen ; she is wearing her outdoor clothes. She crosses to the table, strikes a match with her back to the audience and lights the lamp, then the wall lamp. The twilight is dispelled.

NURSE (*shutting her bag, rising*) : You'll be all right ; a bit light-headed after the fall, I expect. (*Going to the hall*) Well, got an abscess the other side of Turneyfield, and a slow puncture. So long, lovey.

DAN (*sitting up*) So long !

NURSE : Be good, all !

[*She bustles out of the front door. A pause. DAN sits looking before him, drumming his fingers on the sofa*

DORA (*closing the right window-curtains*) : What's the matter with him ?

MRS. TERENCE : Conked out.

DORA : Conked out ? Oh, dear. . . . D'you think 'e see'd something ? I'll tell you what it is !

MRS. TERENCE (*closing the left window-curtains*) : What ?

DORA : The monster's lurking again.

[*Mechanically DAN takes a box of matches and a cigarette from his pocket.*

MRS. TERENCE : I'll give you lurk, my girl, look at the egg on my toby ! Why don't you learn to wash up, instead of walkin' about talking like three-halfpennyworth of trash ?

DORA : I can't wash up properly in that kitchen, with that light. Them little oil lamps isn't any good except to set the place on fire.

[*She goes into the kitchen. DAN drums his fingers on the sofa. MRS. BRAMSON wheels herself from the bedroom.*

MRS. BRAMSON : I dropped off. Why didn't somebody wake me ? Have I been missing something ?

MRS. TERENCE That Inspector Belsize called

MRS. BRAMSON (*testily*) : Then why didn't somebody wake me ? Dan, what did he want ?

DAN . Just a friendly call

MRS. BRAMSON You seem very far away, dear
What's the matter with you ? . . . Dan !

DAN : Bit of an 'eadache, that's all.

MRS. BRAMSON . Doesn't make you deaf, though dear, does it ?

MRS. TERENCE Now, now, turnin' against the apple of your eye ; can't 'ave that goin' on——

[*A sharp knock at the front door DAN starts up and goes towards the hall*

MRS. BRAMSON (*to* MRS. TERENCE) : See who it is.

MRS. TERENCE (*at the front door, as DAN is about to push past her*, Oh . it's only the paraffin boy. . . . (*To the boy outside, taking a can from him* And you bring stuff on a Saturday night another time.

[*DAN is standing behind MRS. BRAMSON's chair.*

MRS. BRAMSON . I should think so——

[*MRS. TERENCE comes into the room. DAN strikes a match for his cigarette*

MRS. TERENCE (*unth a cry*) . Oh ! Can't you see this is paraffin ? (*She puts the can on the floor just inside the hall.*)

MRS. BRAMSON : You went through my side like a knife——

MRS. TERENCE : If people knew what to do with their money, they'd put electric light in their 'omes 'stead of dangerin' people's lives.

[She goes into the kitchen. DAN stares before him, the match flickering.]

MRS BRAMSON (*blowing out the match*) : You'll burn your fingers ! Set yourself on fire ! Absent-minded ! . . . I woke up all of a cold shiver. I had a terrible dream.

DAN (*mechanically*) : What about ?

MRS BRAMSON : Horrors. . . I'm freezing. Get me my shawl off my bed, will you, dear ? . . .
As he does not move) My shawl, dear !

[DAN starts, collects himself, and smiles his most ingratiating smile.]

DAN I am sorry, murr. In the Land of Nod, I was ! Let me see, what was it your highness was after ? A shawl ? No sooner said than done . . . You watch me ! One, two, three !

[He runs into the bedroom]

MRS BRAMSON : Silly boy . . . silly boy. . .

[OLIVIA comes in quickly from the kitchen. She is dressed to go out and carries a suitcase.]

Where are you off to ?

OLIVIA I— I've had a telegram. A friend of mine in London's very ill

MRS BRAMSON : What's the matter with her ?

OLIVIA : Pneumonia.

MRS BRAMSON : Where's the telegram ?

OLIVIA . I—I threw it away.

MRS. BRAMSON : Where d'you throw it ?

OLIVIA : I—I —

MRS. BRAMSON . You haven't had any telegram.

OLIVIA (*impatiently*) : No, I haven't !

MRS. BRAMSON : What's the matter with you ?

OLIVIA : I can't stay in this house to-night.

MRS. BRAMSON : Why not ?

OLIVIA : I'm frightened.

MRS. BRAMSON : Oh, don't be——

OLIVIA : Listen to me. I've never known before what it was to be terrified. But when I saw to-day beginning to end, and to-night getting nearer and nearer . . . I felt my finger-tips getting cold. And I knew it was fright . . . stark fright. I'm not a fool, and I'm not hysterical . . . but I've been sitting in my room looking at myself in the glass, trying to control myself, telling myself what are real things . . . and what aren't. I don't know any longer. The day's over. The forest's all round us. Anything may happen. . . . You shouldn't stay in this house to-night. That's all.

MRS. BRAMSON (*blustering*) : It's very silly of you, trying to scare an old woman with a weak heart. What have you got to be frightened of?

OLIVIA : There's been a murder, you know.

MRS. BRAMSON : Nobody's going to murder *you* ! Besides, we've got Danny to look after us. He's as strong as an ox, and no silly nerves about him. . . . What is it you're afraid of?

OLIVIA : I——

MRS. BRAMSON : Sly, aren't you ? . . . Where are you staying to-night ?

OLIVIA : In Langbury, with Hubert Laurie and his sister.

MRS. BRAMSON : Not too frightened to make arrangements with *him*, eh ?

OLIVIA : Arrangements ?

MRS. BRAMSON : Well, some people would call it something else.

OLIVIA (*losing her temper*) : Oh, won't you see . . .

MRS. BRAMSON : I'm very annoyed with you. How are you going to get there ?

OLIVIA : Walking.

MRS. BRAMSON : Through the forest ? Not too frightened for that, I see.

OLIVIA : I'd rather spend to-night in the forest than in this house.

MRS. BRAMSON : That sounds convincing, I must say. Well, you can go, but when you come back, I'm not so sure I shall answer the door. I think that over in the morning.

OLIVIA : The morning ? . . .

DAN'S VOICE (*in the bedroom, singing*) : " . . . their home addresses . . . and their caresses . . . linger in my memory of those beautiful dainties . . . "

[OLIVIA listens, holding her breath ; she tries to say something to MRS. BRAMSON, and fails. She makes an effort, and runs out of the front door. It bangs behind her. DAN comes back from the bedroom, carrying a shawl.]

DAN (*over-casual*) : What was that at the door ?

MRS. BRAMSON : My niece. Gone for the night, if you please.

DAN : Gone . . . for the night ? (*He stares before him.*)

MRS. BRAMSON : Would you believe it ? Says she's frightened. . . .

[A pause.]

Come along with the shawl, dear. I'm freezing. . . .

DAN (*with a laugh, putting the shawl round her*) : Don't know what's up with me——

[He goes to the table and looks at a newspaper.]

MRS. TERENCE comes in from the kitchen, her coat on.

MRS. TERENCE : Well, I must go on me way rejoicin'.

MRS. BRAMSON : Everybody seems to be going
What is all this ?

MRS. TERENCE : What d'you want for lunch to-morrow ?

MRS. BRAMSON : Lunch to-morrow ? . . . Let me see. . . .

DAN : Lunch ? To-morrow ? . . . (*After a pause*)
What about a nice little steak ?

MRS. BRAMSON : A steak, let me see. . . . Yes with baked potatoes——

DAN : And a nice roly-poly puddin', the kind you like ?

MRS. BRAMSON : I think so.

MRS. TERENCE : Something light. O.K. Good night.

[*She goes back into the kitchen. DAN scans the newspaper casually.*]

MRS. BRAMSON (*inquisitive*) : What are you reading, dear ?

DAN (*breezily*) : Only the murder again. About the clues that wasn't any good.

MRS. BRAMSON (*suddenly*) : Danny, d'you think Olivia's a thief ?

DAN : Shouldn't be surprised.

MRS. BRAMSON : What !

DAN : Her eyes wasn't very wide apart.

MRS. BRAMSON (*working herself up*) : Goodness me . . . my jewel-box . . . what a fool I was to let her go—my ear-rings . . . the double-faced——

[*She wheels herself furiously into her bedroom. DORA, her hat and coat on, comes in from the kitchen in time to see her go.*]

DORA : What's up with her ?

DAN (*still at his paper*) : Thinks she's been robbed.

DORA : Oh, is that all. . . . That's the fourth time this month she's thought that. One of these days something *will* 'appen to her, and will I be pleased ? Oh, baby ! . . . Where's Mrs Terence ?

DAN : Gone, I think

DORA (*frightened*) : Oh, law, no ! (*Calling*) Mrs. Terence !

MRS. TERENCE (*calling, in the kitchen*) : Ye-es !

DORA : You 'aven't gone without me, 'ave you ?

MRS. TERENCE (*appearing at the kitchen door, sparring a hairpin into her hat*) : Yes, I'm 'alf-way there. What d you think ?

DORA : You did give me a turn ! (*Going to the table and taking the box*) I think I'll 'ave a choc. (*Walking towards the hall*) I couldn't 'ave walked a step in those trees all by myself. Coming ?

DAN (*suddenly*) : I'd have come with you with pleasure, only I'm going the other direction. Parky Hill way.

MRS. TERENCE (*surprised*) : You going out ?

DORA : Oh ?

DAN (*in the hall, putting on hat and mackintosh*) : Yes I still feel a bit funny

MRS. TERENCE : But you can't leave 'er 'ere by herself !

DORA : She'll scream the place down !

DAN (*over-explanatory*) : I asked her, this very minute, and she don't seem to mind. You know what she is. Said it'd do me good, and won't hear of me stayin'. It's no good arguin' with her.

[DORA puts the chocolates down on the occasional table. She and MRS. TERENCE follow DAN into the hall]

DORA : No good arguin' with her—don't I know it !

MRS. TERENCE : You 'ave a nice long walk while you get the chance ; you wait on 'er too much. . . . (*Closing the plush curtains so that they are all out of sight*) Ooh, ain't it dark. . . . Got the torch, Dora ?

DORA : O.K., honey

MRS. TERENCE : Laws, I'd be frightened goin' off by meself. . . . Well, we'd best 'urry, Dora. . . . Good night, Dan. Pity you aren't comin' our way—

DAN'S VOICE : See you in the morning ! Good night !

DORA'S VOICE : O.K. ! . . . Toodle-oo !

[*The door bangs. A pause.*]

DAN'S VOICE (*outside the left window*) : Good night !

MRS. TERENCE'S VOICE (*outside the right window*) : Good night !

DORA (*same*) : Good night !

[*Silence*]

MRS. TERENCE (*farther away*) : Good night !

DORA (*same*) : Good night !

[*MRS. BRAMSON comes trundling back from the bedroom in her chair.*]

MRS. BRANSOM : Good night here, good night there ; anybody'd think it was the night before Judgment Day. What's the matter with . . . (*Seeing the room is empty*) Talking to myself. Wish people wouldn't walk out of rooms and leave me high and dry. Don't like it. (*She wheels herself round to the table. A pause. She looks round impatiently.*) Where's my chocolates ? . . .

[*She looks round again, gets up out of her chair for the first time in the play, walks quite normally across*]

the room to the mantelpiece, sees her chocolates are not there, walks up to the occasional table, and takes up the box.

That girl's been at them again. . . .

[She walks back to her chair, carrying the chocolates, and sits in it again. She begins to munch. She suddenly stops, as if she has heard something.

What's that? . . .

[She listens again. A cry is heard far away.

Oh, God. . . . Danny !

[The cry is repeated.

Danny !

[The cry is heard a third time.

It's an owl. . . . Oh, Lord !

[She falls back in relief, and eats another chocolate. The clock strikes the half-hour. Silence. The silence gets on her nerves.

[After a pause, calling softly] Danny ! . . . (As there is no answer) What's the boy doing in that kitchen ?

[She takes up the newspaper, sees a headline, and puts it down hastily. She sees the Bible on the table, opens it, and turns over pages.

[After a pause, suddenly] I've got the jitters. I've got the jitters. I've got the jitters. . . . (Calling loudly) Danny !

[She waits ; there is complete silence. She rises, walks over to the kitchen door, and flings it wide open.

[Shouting] Danny ! (No reply.) He's gone. . . . They've all gone. . . . They've left me. . . .

[Losing control, beating her hands wildly on her Bible] Oh, Lord, help a poor old woman. . . . They've left me ! (Tottering to the sun-room) Danny . . . where are you ? . . . Danny . . . I'm going to be murdered . . . I'm going to be murdered ! . . . Danny . . . (Her voice rising, until she is shrieking hysterically) Danny ! Danny ! Danny !

[She stops suddenly. Footsteps on the gravel outside the front door.]

(In a strangled whisper) There's something outside . . . something outside. . . . Oh, heavens. . .
(Staggering across to the sofa) Danny, where are you? Where are you? There's something out—

[The front door bangs. She collapses on the sofa terrified, her enormous Bible clasped to her breast.]

Oh, Lord, help me . . . help me. . . . Oh, Lord help me. . . . *(Muttering, her eyes closed)* . . .
Forgive us our trespasses . . .

[The curtains are suddenly parted. It is DAN, cigarette between his lips. He stands motionless, his feet planted apart, holding the curtains. There is murder in his face. She is afraid to look, but is forced to at last.]

Danny. . . . Oh. . . . Oh. . . .

DAN *(smiling, suddenly normal and reassuring)*
That's all right. . . . It's only Danny. . . .

MRS. BRAMSON : Thank God . . . *(Going off into laughing hysterics)* Ah . . . ah . . . ah . . .

[DAN throws his cigarette away, lays his hat on the occasional table, throws his mackintosh on the left window-seat, and sits beside her, patting her looking round to see no one has heard her cries.]

I'll never forgive you, never. Oh, my heart. . .
Oh—oh—oh—

[He runs across to the medicine cupboard and brings back a brandy bottle and two glasses.]

DAN: Now have a drop of this. . . . *(As she winces at the taste)* Go on, do you good. . . . *(As she drinks)* I am sorry, I am really. . . . You see, they wanted me to see them to the main path, past the rubbish-heap, see, in case they was frightened. . . . Now that's better, isn't it?

[*They are seated side by side on the sofa.*

MRS. BRAMSON : I don't know yet. . . . Give me some more. . . .

[*He pours one out for her, and for himself. They drink.*

All alone, I was. . . . (*Her face puckering with self pity*) Just an old woman calling for help . . . (*her voice breaking*) . . . and no answer. . . .

DAN (*putting the bottle on the floor beside him*) : Poor old mum, runnin' about lookin' for Danny—

MRS. BRAMSON (*sharply*) : I wasn't running about as much as all that. . . . Oh, the relief when I saw your face—

DAN : I bet you wasn't half glad, eh ?

MRS. BRAMSON : You're the only one that understands me, Danny, that's what you are—

DAN (*patting her*) : That's right—

MRS. BRAMSON : I don't have to tell you everything I've been through. I don't have to tell you about my husband, how unkind and ungodly he was—I wouldn't have minded so much him being ungodly, but oh, he *was* unkind. . . . (*Sipping*) And I don't have to tell you how unkind he was. You know. You just know . . . whatever else I've not been, I was *always* a great one on psychology.

DAN : You was. (*He takes her glass and fills it again, and his own.*)

MRS. BRAMSON : I'm glad those other people have gone. Awful screeching common women. Answer back, answer back, answer back. . . . Isn't it time for my medicine ?

[*He hands her glass back. They both drink. DAN sits smiling and nodding at her.*

That day you said to me about me reminding you of your mother. . . . (DAN slowly begins to roll up his sleeves a little way.) These poets and rubbishy people can think all they like about their verses and sonnets and such—that girl Olivia writes sonnets—would you believe it—

DAN : Fancy.

MRS. BRAMSON : They can think all they like that was a beautiful thought. (Her arm on his shoulder) And when you think you're just an ignorant boy, it's . . . it's startling.

DAN (with a loud laugh) : That's right.

MRS. BRAMSON : I'll never forget that. Not as long as I live. . . . (Trying to stem her tears) I want a chocolate now.

DAN : Right you are ! . . . (Placing her glass and his own on the floor and walking briskly to the table) A nice one with a soft centre, the kind you like. . . . Why, here's one straight away. . . . (He walks slowly to the back of the sofa. In a level voice) Now shut your eyes . . . open your mouth . . .

MRS. BRAMSON (purring) : Oh, Danny. . . . You're the only one . . .

[She shuts her eyes. He stands behind her, and puts the chocolate into her mouth. His fingers close slowly and involuntarily over her neck : she feels his touch, and draws both his hands down, giggling, so that his face almost touches hers.]

(Maudlin) What strong hands they are. . . . You're a pet, my little chubby-face, my baby-face, my Danny. . . . Am I in a draught ?

[A pause. DAN draws his hands slowly away, walks to the back, and shuts the plush curtains.]

I've got to take care of myself, haven't I ?

DAN (*turning slowly and looking at her*) : You
ave.

[*He picks up the paraffin can briskly and goes towards the kitchen.*]

MRS. BRAMSON : What are you——

DAN : Only takin' the paraffin tin in the
kitchen

[*He goes into the kitchen.*]

MRS. BRAMSON (*half to herself*) : That girl should
ave carried it in. Anything to annoy me. To-
morrow—— (*Turning and seeing that he is gone*)
Dunny ! (*Shrinking suddenly*) Danny !

[*DAN runs back from the kitchen.*]

DAN . What's the matter ?

[*He looks hastily towards the hall to see no one has
heard*]

MRS. BRAMSON : Oh, dear, I thought——

DAN (*sitting on the back of the sofa*) : I was only
utting the paraffin away. Now—— (*He leans
on the sofa, and raises his arm slowly*)

MRS. BRAMSON (*putting her hand on his arm*) : I
think I'll go to bed now.

DAN (*after a pause, dropping his arm*) : O.K.

MRS. BRAMSON : And I'll have my supper-tray
in my room. (*Petulantly*) Get me back into my
hall, dear, will you ?

DAN (*jerkily*) : O.K. . . .

[*He crosses to the invalid-chair.*]

MRS. BRAMSON : Has she put the glass by the
chair for my teeth ?

DAN (*bringing over the chair*) : I put it there
myself.

[*He helps her into the chair and pulls it over
towards the bedroom.*]

MRS. BRAMSON (*suddenly, in the middle of the room*) : I want to be read to now.

DAN (*after a pause of indecision*) : O K. (*Clapping his hands effusively*) What'll you have? The old East Lynne?

MRS. BRAMSON. No, I don't feel like anything sentimental to-night . . .

DAN (*looking towards the desk*) : What'll you have then?

MRS. BRAMSON. I think I'd like the Bible.

[A pause. He looks at her]

DAN. O K.

MRS. BRAMSON (*as he goes smartly to the sofa fetches the Bible, pulls up a chair to the right of her sits, and looks for the place*) That piece you were reading . . . It's Sunday . . . Isn't that nice all the aches and pains quiet for once . . . pretty peaceful . . .

DAN (*reading*) "Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful . . ."

MRS. BRAMSON (*drowsily*) : You read so nicely, Danny.

DAN. Very kind of you, my lady (*Reading a little breathlessly*) "But his delight is in the law of the Lord; and in His law doth he meditate day and night——"

MRS. BRAMSON. Sh!

DAN. What?

MRS. BRAMSON. What's that?

DAN. Can you hear something?

MRS. BRAMSON. Yes! A sort of—thumping noise . . .

[*She looks at him suddenly, leans forward, and puts her right hand inside his jacket*]

Why, Danny, it's you ! It's your heart . . .
eating !

[*He laughs.*]

Well ! Are you all right, dear ?

DAN : Fine. I been running along the path,
. . . (*Garrulously*) I been out of training, I
suppose ; when I was at sea I never missed a
day running round the decks, o' course. . . .

MRS. BRAMSON (*sleepily*) : Of course.

DAN (*speaking quickly, as if eager to conjure up a
vision*) : I remember those mornings—on some
day—very misty pale it is, with the sun like
reaching silver where he's comin' up across
the water, but not blowing on the sea at all . . .
and the sea-gulls standing on the deck-rail
looking at themselves in the water on the deck,
and only me about and nothing else . . .

MRS. BRAMSON (*nodding sleepily*) : Yes . . .

DAN . And the sun. Just me and the sun.

MRS. BRAMSON (*nodding*) : There's no sun now,
dear ; it's night !

[*A pause. He drums his fingers on the Bible.*]

DAN : Yes . . . it's night now. (*Reading, feverishly*)
The ungodly are not so, but are like the chaff
which the wind driveth away——"

MRS. BRAMSON : I think I'll go to bye-byes. . . .
We'll have the rest to-morrow, shall we ?
(*Stily*) Help me, dear, help me, you know
that I am——

DAN (*drumming his fingers : suddenly, urgently*) :
Wait a minute . . . I—I've only got two more
verses——

MRS. BRAMSON : Hurry it up, dear. I don't want
to wake up in the morning with a nasty cold.

DAN (*reading slowly*) : " . . . Therefore the un-
godly shall not stand in the judgment, nor

sinner in the congregation of the righteous. . . .
For the Lord knoweth the way of the righteous
. . . . but the way of the ungodly . . . shall
perish . . .”

[*A pause. He shuts the Bible loudly, and lays it on
the table. MRS. BRAMSON can hardly keep awake.*

That's the end.

MRS. BRAMSON : Is it ? . . . Ah, well, it's been a
long day——

DAN : Are you quite comfortable ?

MRS. BRAMSON : A bit achy. Glad to get to bed.
Hope that woman's put my bottie in all right.
Bet she hasn't——

DAN : Sure you're comfortable ? Wouldn't you
like a cushion back of your head ?

MRS. BRAMSON : No, dear, just whcel me——

DAN (*rising*) : I think you'll be more comfortable
with a cushion. (*Rising, humming*) “ I'm a pretty
little feller, everybody knows . . . dunno what
to call me . . .”

[*He goes deliberately across, humming, and picks
up a large black cushion from the sofa. His hands
close on the cushion, and he stands silent a moment.
He moves slowly back to the other side of her ; he
stands looking at her, his back three-quarters to the
audience and his face hidden : he is holding the
cushion in both hands.*

MRS. BRAMSON *shakes herself out of sleep and
looks at him.*

MRS. BRAMSON : What a funny look on your
face, dear. Smiling like that. . . . (*Foolishly*) You
look so kind . . .

[*He begins to raise the cushion slowly.*

So kind . . . (*Absently*) What are you going to do
with that cushion ? . . .

[The lights dim gradually into complete darkness, and the music grows into a thunderous crescendo.]

SCENE II

The music plays a few bars, then dies down proportionately as the lights come up again

Half an hour later. The scene is the same, with the same lighting ; the room is empty and the wheel-chair has been removed.

DAN comes in from the sun-room, smoking the stub of a cigarette. He crosses smartly, takes the bottle and glasses from the floor by the sofa and places them on the table, pours himself a quick drink, places the bottle on the floor next the desk, throws away his stub, takes another cigarette from his pocket, puts it in his mouth, takes out a box of matches, and lights a match. The clock chimes. He looks at it, seems to make a decision, blows out the match, throws the match-box on the table, takes MRS. BRAMON'S tape and keys from his trouser pocket, crosses quickly to the safe by the fireplace, opens it, takes out the cash-box, sits on the sofa, unlocks the cash-box, stuffs the keys back into his trousers, opens the cash-box, takes out the notes, looks at them, delighted, stuffs them into his pocket, hurries into the sun-room, returns a second later with the empty invalid chair, plants it in the middle of the room, picks up the cushion from the floor above the table, looks at it a moment, arrested, throws it callously on the invalid chair, hurries into the kitchen, returns immediately with the paraffin, sprinkles it freely over the invalid chair, places the can under the table, lifts the paraffin lamp from the table, and is just about to smash it over the invalid chair when there is the sound of a chair falling over in the sun-room. His face inscrutable, he looks towards it. He carries the lamp stealthily to the desk, puts it down, looks round, picks a chair from near the table, and stands at the sun-room door with the chair held high above his head.

The stagger of footsteps ; OLIVIA stands in the doorway to the sun-room. She has been running through the forest ; her clothes are wild, her hair has fallen about her shoulders, and she is no longer wearing her spectacles. She looks nearly beautiful. Her manner is quiet, almost dazed. He lowers the chair slowly and sits on the other side of the table. A pause.

OLIVIA : I've never seen a dead body before. . . . I climbed through the window and nearly fell over it. Like a sack of potatoes, or something. I thought it was, at first. . . . And that's murder.

[As he looks up at her.

But it's so ordinary. . . . I came back . . .

[As he lights his cigarette.

. . . expecting . . . ha *(laughing hysterically)* . . . I don't know . . . and here I find you, smoking a cigarette . . . you might have been tidying the room for the night. It's so . . . ordinary. . . . *(After a pause, with a cry)* Why don't you say something !

DAN : I thought you were goin' to stay the night at that feller's.

OLIVIA : I was.

DAN : What d'you come back for ?

OLIVIA *(the words pouring out)* : To find you out. You've kept me guessing for a fortnight. Guessing hard. I very nearly knew, all the time. But not quite. And now I do know.

DAN : Why was you so keen on finding me out ?

OLIVIA *(vehemently, coming to the table)* : In the same way any sane, decent-minded human being would want—would want to have you arrested for the monster you are !

DAN *(quietly)* : What d'you come back for ?

OLIVIA : I . . . I've told you. . . .

[He smiles at her slowly and shakes his head. She sits at the table and closes her eyes.]

got as far as the edge of the wood. I could see the lights in the village. . . . I came back

[She buries her head in her arms. DAN rises, looks at her a moment regretfully, puts away his cigarette, and stands with both hands over the invalid chair.]

DAN (*casually*): She didn't keep any money anywhere else, did she?

IRVIA: I've read a lot about evil—

[DAN realises his hands are wet with paraffin and wipes them on his trousers]

DAN Clumsy. . . .

IRVIA: I never expected to come across it in real life.

DAN (*lightly*): You didn't ought to read so much. I never got through a book yet. . . . But I'll read you all right. . . . (*Crossing to her, leaning over the table, and smiling at her intently*) You haven't had a drop to drink, and yet you feel as if you had. You never knew there was such a secret part inside of you. All that book-learnin' and moral-me-cye here and social-me-cye there— you took that off on the edge of the wood same as if it was an overcoat. . . . and you left it there!

IRVIA: I hate you. I . . . hate you!

DAN (*urgently*): And same as anybody out for the first time without their overcoat, you feel as light as air! Same as I feel, sometimes—only I never had no overcoat—(*Excited*) Why—this is my big chance! You're the one I can tell about myself! Oh, I'm sick o' hearin' how clever everybody else is—I want to tell 'em how clever I am for a change! . . . Money I'm goin' to have, and people doin' what they're told, and me tellin' them to do it! There was a 'oman at the 'allboys, wasn't there? She wouldn't be told,

would she? She thought she was up 'gainst a soft fellow in a uniform, didn't she? She never knew it was *me* she was dealin' with—(*striking his chest in a paroxysm of elation*)—*me*! And this old girl treatin' me like a son 'cause I made her think she was a chronic invalid—ha! She's been more use to me to-night (*tapping the notes in his jacket pocket, smartly*) than she has to any other body all her life. Stupid, that's what people are . . . stupid. If those two hadna' been stupid they might be breathin' now; you're not stupid; that's why I'm talkin' to you (*With exaggerated self-possession*) You said just now murder's ordinary. . . . Well, it isn't ordinary at all, see? And I'm not an ordinary chap. There's one big difference 'tween me and other fellows that try this game. I'll *never be found out* 'Cause I don't care a — (*Snapping his fingers grandly*) The world's goin' to hear from me. That's me (*Chuckling*) You wait. . . . (*After a pause*) But you can't wait, can you?

OLIVIA: What do you mean?

DAN: Well, when I say I'll never be found out, what I mean is, no living soul will be able to tell any other living soul about me (*Beginning to roll up a sleeve, nonchalantly*) Can you think of anybody . . . who can go to-morrow . . . and tell the police the fire at Forest Corner . . . wasn't an accident at all?

OLIVIA: I—I can.

DAN: Oh, no, you can't.

OLIVIA: Why can't I?

DAN: Well, I'm up against a very serious problem, I am. But the answer to it is as simple as pie, to a feller like me, simple as pie . . . (*Rolling up the other sleeve a little way*) She isn't going to be the only one . . . found to-morrow . . . in the fire at Forest Corner. . . . (*After a pause*)

Aren't you frightened? You ought to be!
(Smiling) Don't you think I'll do it?

OLIVIA: I know you will. I just can't realise it.

DAN You know, when I told you all that about meself just now, I'd made up my mind then about you. (*Moving slowly after her, round the table, as she steps back towards the window.*) That's what I am, see? I make up me mind to do a thing, and I do it . . . You remember that first day when I come in here? I said to meself then, There's a girl that's got her wits about her, she knows a thing or two; different from the others. I was right, wasn't I? You—(*Stopping abruptly, and looking round the room*) What's that light in here?

OLIVIA: What light?

DAN: There's somebody in this room's holdin' a flashlight.

OLIVIA: It can't be in this room. . . . It must be a light in the wood.

DAN: It can't be.

[*A flashlight crosses the window-curtains. OLIVIA turns and stares at it.*]

OLIVIA: Somebody's watching the bungalow. . . .

[*He looks at her, as if he did not understand.*]

DAN (*furcely*): Nobody's watching! . . . (*He runs to the window. She backs into the corner of the room.*)

I'm the one that watches! They've got no call to watch me! I'll go out and tell them that, an' all! (*Opening the curtains in a frenzy*) I'm the one that watches!

[*The light crosses the window again. He stares, then claps his hands over his eyes.*]

(*Backing to the sofa*) Behind them trees. (*Clutching the invalid chair*) Hundreds back of each tree. . . . Thousands of eyes. The whole damn world's on my track ! . . . (*Sitting on the edge of the sofa, and listening*) What's that ? . . . Like a big wall fallin' over into the sea. . . . (*Closing his hands over his ears convulsively.*)

OLIVIA (*coming down to him*) : They mustn't come in. . . .

DAN (*turning to her*) : Yes, but . . . (*Staring*) You're lookin' at me as if you never see'd me before. . . .

OLIVIA : I never have. Nobody has. You've stopped acting at last. You're real. Frightened like a child. (*Putting her arm about his shoulders*) They mustn't come in. . . .

DAN : But everything's slippin' away. From underneath our feet. . . . Can't you feel it ? Starting slow . . . and then hundreds of miles an hour. . . . I'm goin' backwards ! . . . And there's a wind in my ears, terrible blowin' wind. . . . Everything's going past me, like the telegraph-poles. . . . All the things I've ever seen . . . faster and faster . . . backwards—back to the day I was born. (*Shrieking*) I can see it coming . . . the day I was born ! . . . (*Turning to her, simply*) I'm goin' to die.

[*A pause.*]

A knock at the front door.

It's getting cold.

[*Another knock, louder. She presses his head to her.*]

OLIVIA : It's all right. You won't die. I'll tell them I made you do it. I'll tell lies—I'll tell—

[*A third and louder knock at the front door. She realises she must answer, goes into the hall, opens the front door, and comes back, hiding DAN from view.*]

BELSIZE (*in the hall*) : Good evening. . . . Sorry to pop back like this—

[*He comes into the room, followed by DORA and MRS. TERENCE, both terrified.*]

(*Looking round*) Everything looks all right here.

MRS. TERENCE : I tell you we *did* 'ear her ! Plain as plain ! And we'd gone near a quarter of a mile—

DORA : Plain as plain —

MRS. TERENCE : Made my blood run cold. " Danny ! " she screamed. " Danny, where are you ? " she said. She wanted 'im back, she did, to save 'er—

DORA : Because she was bein' murdered. I knew it ! I'd never a' run like that if I 'adn't 'card—

BELSIZE : We'll soon find out who's right. . . . Now then— (*As OLIVIA steps aside behind the sofa*) Hello, Dan !

DAN (*quietly, rising and standing by the fireplace*) : Hello.

BELSIZE (*standing behind the invalid chair*) : Second time to-day, eh ? . . .

DAN : That's right.

BELSIZE : How's the old lady ?

DAN (*after a pause*) : Not so bad, thanks, inspector ! Gone to bed, and says she didn't want to be disturbed—

BELSIZE : Smell of paraffin . . .

DAN (*with a last desperate attempt at bluster*) : You know what she's like, inspector, a bit nervy these days—

[*As BELSIZE goes to the bedroom and flashes a light into it.*]

I'd no sooner got round the corner she screamed at me—" Danny, Danny, Danny ! " she was

screamin'—"Danny," she calls me, a pet name for Dan, that is——

[*As BELSIZE goes into the sun-room.*

(*Rambling on mechanically*) I told her so then. said, "It's dangerous, that's what it is, havin' so much paraffin in the house." That paraffin—she shouldn't ha' had so much paraffin in the house——

[*His voice trails away. Silence. BELSIZE comes back, his face intent, one hand in coat pocket. A pause.*

BELSIZE (*to OLIVIA*) : What are you doing here ?

OLIVIA : I'm concerned in——

DAN (*loudly, decisively, silencing her*) : It's all right. (*Crossing to BELSIZE and swaggering desperately, in front of the women*) I'm the feller. Anything I'm concerned in, I run all by myself. If there's going to be any putting me on a public platform to answer any questions, I'm going to do it by myself . . . (*looking at OLIVIA*) . . . or not at all. I'll manage myself all right——

BELSIZE : I get you. Like a bit of limelight, eh ?

DAN (*smiling*) : Well . . .

BELSIZE (*as if humouring him*) : Let's have a look at your hands, old boy, will you ?

[*With an amused look at OLIVIA, DAN holds out his hands. Without warning, BELSIZE claps a pair of handcuffs over his wrists. DAN stares at them a moment, then sits on the sofa and starts to pull at them furiously over his knee. He beats at them wildly, moaning and crying like an animal. He subsides gradually, looks at the others and rises.*

DAN (*muttering, holding his knee*) : Hurt meself. . . .

BELSIZE : That's better. . . . Better come along quietly. . . .

[He goes up towards the hall. DAN follows him, and takes his hat from the occasional table. As he puts it on he catches sight of his face in the mirror.

To the others, crisply, during this) I've a couple of outside I'll send 'em in. See that nothing's stirred . . . Coming, old chap?

DORA What's 'e doin'?

MRS FLEWCE He's lookin' at himself in the ass . . .

[A pause.

DAN (speaking to the mirror) Thus is the real thing, my boy Actin'. . . That's what she said, isn't it? She was right you know . . . I've been actin' up to you, haven't I? I showed you a kick or two, didn't I? . . . But this is the real thing (Sighing) Got a cigarette? (Seeing OLIVIA) You're not comin' to believe what she did? About helpin' me?

MISS (humouring him) No (Putting a cigarette between DAN's lips and lighting it) Plenty of women a bit hysterical about a lad in your position. You'll find 'em queuing up all right when the time comes. Proposals of marriage by the score.

DAN (pleased) Will they?

MISS : Come along —

[DAN turns to follow him. DORA is in the way.

DAN Oh, yes I forgot about you (Smiling with a curious detached sadness) Poor little fellow Poor little chap . . . (Looking round) You know, I'd like somethin' now I never wanted before A long walk, all by meself And just when I can't have it. (Laughing) That's contrary, isn't it?

MISS (sternly) : Coming?

DAN (looking at OLIVIA) Just comin' (He goes to OLIVIA, takes out his cigarette, puts his manacled arms round her, and kisses her suddenly and violently

on the mouth. He releases her with an air of bravado, puts back his cigarette, and looks at her) Well, I'm goin' to be hanged in the end. . . . But they'll get their money's worth at the trial. You wait !

[He smiles, and raises his hand to his hat-brim with the old familiar jaunty gesture of farewell. He walks past BELSIZE and out through the front door. BELSIZE follows him. The bang of the front door. OLIVIA falls to the sofa.

The sound of DORA's sobbing.

C U R T A I N

ACCENT ON YOUTH

Samson Raphaelson

ACCENT ON YOUTH

A Play
In Three Acts

With a Preface by
JOHN ANDERSON

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ACCENT ON YOUTH

Copyright, 1931, by Samson Raphaelson
(Under the title "Old Love")

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To
DORSHKA, JOEL, AND NAOMI

PREFACE

It was William McFee who once defined the ideal book review as a frolic on the library steps. That engaging theory, if adapted to the published drama, should, I suppose, make the preface to a play a sort of romp in the theatre lobby. Possibly it should reflect the glimmer of electric signboards, suggest the bustle of happy playgoers in the glow of cosmopolitan bliss, the deferential snobbery of carriage starters, and capture all the pretty incidentals of a play's lifetime so that it would carry into its printed immortality all the joys it knew when it was on the boards, not between them.

But *Accent on Youth* does not, I think, need such artificial preservations, even if I had them to give, since its essential life gracefully survives its translation from the stage to the book-shelf. This is not often the case with modern plays, since most of them are written so obviously to be spoken, and almost as obviously to go in one ear and out the other. They fill well enough the void which threatens the ardent playgoer between eight-thirty and eleven o'clock in the evening, and they are really through when the curtain is down, as useless, the next day, as the stubs of your tickets.

This comedy, however, has a savour and a style which lend it a special quality in the theatre, and which, separated in the following pages from Mr. Gauge's brilliant production, identify this quality as the personal property of the author. In these sleeveless times for a critic to say that a play has literary merit is usually taken as another, and more violent form of damnation. Oddly enough it implies the scornful tribute of "fine writing" in an art which, too seldom, achieves any writing at all.

It is safer, then, to avoid shabby inferences, to say that Mr. Raphaelson's play has style, and that, in Havelock Ellis's sense, his style is his

viewpoint, and his viewpoint is illuminating, urbane, and witty. It is part of his craftsmanship as a playwright. He has as much respect for his characters as he has for his audience, or himself, and since he is writing about literate people in subtle complications of mood and impulse, he, being a literate playwright, turns them into human beings instead of mere stage names for a group of pleasant actors. It is the distinction between simply a funny play and a true comedy.

This matter of humour is close to the secret of the play's provocative charm and steady radiance. Mr. Raphaelson schemes out of his persuasive events a persistent, though unlaboured, glow of amusement, knowing, as he does, that the inner smile is often most warming to the heart because it is nearest to it. His comedy is aimed at the heart, not the funnybone, so that its tear-strewn laughter echoes beyond the reach of the easier wisecrack. This quality, adroitly wrought into characters and dialogue, gives *Accent on Youth* its flavour and distinction.

Mr. Raphaelson has frankly made it a matter of record that when he first wrote the play he made tragedy of the idea of an elderly man falling in love with a young girl. It is further a matter of record that many a true word is spoken in jest. It is the truth of his play that imparts to it a touching and gracious integrity in the theatre, and it is the jest that enkindles it with the warmth of its humanity, the glint of its unerring comedy, and the wisdom of its viewpoint. The geniality of the play does not hide the fact that it also has something to say.

For this matter of youth is a monstrous and insistent myth in the world against which any competent challenger must lunge with the taste of sour grapes in his mouth. Our elders have harked the issue, generations without end, on the cowardly notion that "youth must be served" with the curious and forlorn assumption, presumably, that the colour of a man's

beard is necessarily the colour of his mind. They forgot that the absence of one might imply the absence of the other.

There are scores of wise saws and modern instances to back up the argument, proofs galore that there is no fool like an old fool, and that an old fool in love is a pathetically funny sight, the funniest, perhaps, except a young fool in love. Mr. Raphaelson is shrewd to make the distinction, truly witty when he puts it so genially into dialogue.

For it takes both to make the point, and to make it as pertinently as it is made in *Accent on Youth* in the face of a world that accepts youth, *ipso facto*, as a touchstone in modern life or any life. On a troubled planet, bristling with youth movements, this play has the poise and honesty to say that youth, as youth, isn't any better than age, as age. It says cleverly and sharply that it depends, as other human matters depend, upon the person who is old or young. It is no special and peculiar fate—like being able to wiggle your ears.

The very intolerant, which is to say the very young, may complain that Mr. Raphaelson has won his point in the play by making the young man out a perfect fool to begin with. But he hasn't; he has only endowed him with the essential qualities of inexperience. If that be youth, then youth must make the most of it. He has clung to the fair ideal that even the young cannot have their cake and eat it too. And he has given his young woman in the play the intuition to make the distinction. It is her choice, we must remember, the choice of wise youth (wise not out of years, but out of bitter experience, which is the same thing)—it is her choice, I say, that sets a civilised though elderly human being above a handsome nitwit who takes setting up exercises. Love makes a fool of a man who already is one, and a wiser man of a man who is wise.

It is an easy thing for people to read ideas

into an artist's work that the artist might disclaim in the detachment of his creation. And I am not one to belabour a bright comedy into moral Q.E.Ds. But if woman is the superman, the huntress, the predatory female seeking a fit mate for the improvement of the race, it must be a victory for the race when she chooses brains against the Daily Dozen. Brawn is no longer the immediate necessity for winning food in the world (at least not at this writing), and if the thing is to be run above the level of the barnyard, Mr. Raphaelson is slyly convincing in letting us see that a wise peahen is not beguiled by all the sex strutting of fine plumage unless she thinks her mate has something besides his tail feathers.

He gives this woman, if I may be forgiven a bold comparison, something beyond *Candida's* wisdom, the humane wisdom to choose the man who needs her most. That is a pretty and romantic notion, defensible on all grounds of sentiment and maternal impulse. But it seems likelier and closer to the arrogance of selection, if she chooses, as she does in *Accent on Youth*, the man she needs most. It is this sense of equality, I think, this graciousness of mutual need, this notion that people have to be more to each other than biological mates to make biology humanly workable in a civilised society which give this play its point and edge.

You have only to ring the obvious changes on Mr. Raphaelson's plot to reach this conclusion. If she had tried marriage with another man of Steven Gaye's years but with more money, the point would remain true but banal. If a man younger than Steven Gaye, but equally clever, and charming, and congenial, had touched her life, she might have gone with him, and youth might have weighed out the difference.

But the point is that youth as youth doesn't lure her because—and here perhaps is the pith of the matter, youth isn't entirely a question of

years on the earth so much as it is a matter of what you use them for. A man isn't as young as his arteries, or a woman as old as she looks, when it comes down to the business of living out a civilised existence. Neither is any older or, let us say, fresher than their ideas, a premise, I take it, which makes any dumbell of twenty older than Methuselah for all requirements of human society. In years all of us finally achieve the same age, which is death. What you think until then is your age.

James Stephens made that point with overpowering effect in one of his short stories—the story of a man of forty, who, given a wish, wished that he might always remain his same age. In a veritable nightmare of descriptive narrative Mr. Stephens winds up his parable with the fact that that man died the same night in his sleep, to remain permanently forty, and to get his wish from the usually tricky Fates.

This was, I suspect, more than the physical aspect of that man's timely end. It was plain hint that the man could never be more than forty, and so I, for one, cherish the notion that he died of old age, and of natural causes—natural causes working in his own brain which told him that he was through.

The characters of Mr. Raphaelson's charming comedy meet and make their lives out of that knowledge, a knowledge denied, alas ! to most people who build their lives on external fact. Mr. Raphaelson gives them the humour and courage to see what they are looking at, a stimulating endowment, full of grace and strength. Hence their tale, I think, takes on pertinence and human value beyond its obvious qualities of amusement, and hence, too, I stand here before it to say these things because it is a privilege to say that he has said them so wittily, and so well.

JOHN ANDERSON

New York, *March, 1935.*

Accent on Youth was produced in New York City by Crosby Gaige at the Plymouth Theatre on December 25th, 1934, with the following cast :

<i>Linda Brown</i>	CONSTANCE CUMMINGS
<i>Steven Gaye</i>	NICHOLAS HANNEN
<i>Genevieve Lang</i>	IRINE PURCELL
<i>Flagdell</i>	FRANK COSSART
<i>Frank Galloway</i>	ERNEST LAWFORD
<i>Dickie Reynolds</i>	THEODORE NEWTON
<i>Miss Darling</i>	ELEANOR HICKS
<i>Butch</i>	AL MOORE
<i>Chuck</i>	WILLIAM CARPENTER

Accent on Youth was produced in London by Stanley Hale and Harold Gosling at the Globe Theatre on September 3rd, 1935, with the following cast :

<i>Linda Brown</i>	GREER CARSON
<i>Steven Gaye</i>	NICHOLAS HANNEN
<i>Genevieve Lang</i>	MARY GLYNNE
<i>Flagdell</i>	ARCHIBALD BATTY
<i>Frank Galloway</i>	ERNEST LAWFORD
<i>Dickie Reynolds</i>	ROBERT FLEMING
<i>Miss Darling</i>	MARY GREY
<i>Butch</i>	KENNETH BUCKLEY
<i>Chuck</i>	JAMES HOYLE

DICKIE : How do you like your part ?

MISS DARLING : I adore it ! I think it's Steven Gaye at his best—and it's such a comfortable part—I can be myself, a decent old-fashioned woman.

DICKIE : That's what I like about my part, too—just the word, comfortable. I'm good at sports—so is this fellow. I'm young, so is he. And everything I have to say sort of comes natural. I mean—after all, the public accepts me as romantic, and that's just the kind of part this is. Uh—Miss—

LINDA : Brown.

DICKIE : Miss Brown, you've read the play, I presume ?

LINDA : Yes.

DICKIE : I haven't got to the end—but I get the girl, don't I ?

LINDA : Oh, yes.

DICKIE : Who plays the girl ?

LINDA : Genevieve Lang, I believe

DICKIE . Oh, boy—that's impressive

MISS DARLING : My husband comes back to me, doesn't he ?

LINDA : No.

MISS DARLING (*surprised*) : No ?

LINDA . No.

MISS DARLING : But he must. We've been married thirty years—he's left me for a young girl—the young girl goes off with a young man—he's *got* to come back to me. It's not a *comedy* if he doesn't.

LINDA (*dryly*) : It's *not* a comedy, Miss Darling.

MISS DARLING : Not a comedy ?—How long have you been with Mr. Gaye, my dear ?

LINDA : Three years, Miss Darling.

MISS DARLING : Then surely you know Steven Gaye writes nothing but comedies. It doesn't matter how much the people in the play may suffer, the people in the audience always enjoy it.

LINDA (*patiently*) : Nevertheless *Old Love* is a tragedy, not a comedy.

DICKIE : I think *Old Love* is a comedy title.

GALLOWAY (*who has been trying to read—now looks up*) : It might be to you, young man. It's not to me.

DICKIE : Have you finished reading the play, Mr. Galloway ?

GALLOWAY : Not yet.

DICKIE : I get the girl, don't I ? Have you got that far ?

GALLOWAY : I've got that far.

DICKIE (*to MISS DARLING*) : If I get the girl, it certainly can't be a tragedy.

MISS DARLING : And an old man going off with a young girl—that's *comedy*. If you treat that seriously, it's dirty.

DICKIE : It's not dirty if you marry her. If an old man falls in love with a young girl and marries her legally, there's no law against that.

MISS DARLING : Try and tell that to a theatre audience. And besides, *this* man doesn't marry the girl—he deserts his devoted wife and *runs off* with the girl. Everybody will sympathise with *me*. Don't you think so, Miss—uh—

DICKIE (*volunteers*) : Brown.

MISS DARLING : Miss Brown ?

[*A pause.*]

LINDA : I hope not. If they do, the play will be ruined.

MISS DARLING : What !

LINDA (*almost maliciously*) : The audience should hate the wife, love the husband, laugh at the boy—

DICKIE : Laugh at me !

MISS DARLING : Hate me !

DICKIE : Have you ever seen me on the stage ?

MISS DARLING : What kind of audiences do you think we're going to have—degenerates ? To hate a good wife !

LINDA (*eloquently*) : *Anybody* can leave a bad wife. That's easy. *Anybody* can write a play about it. Everybody does. But it takes a *man* to leave a *good* wife. And it takes a man to write about it. (*It sounds a little as if she has said, or heard, these same words before.*)

GALLOWAY (*rises, strides to the desk and slams down the manuscript. In resonant tones*) : Young lady, will you be good enough to tell Mr. Gaye that I have read his play from cover to cover—and that I have never been so grossly insulted in my life. (*He starts for the table, gets hat, stick and gloves.*) Good afternoon.

LINDA (*coming after him precipitately*) : Oh, Mr. Galloway—please—you mustn't go ! Mr. Gaye will be in any moment. (*With sublime confidence*) After he has talked to you about it, you'll get down on your knees and thank him for the greatest rôle in your career ! (*This doesn't thrill GALLOWAY.*) Please, Mr. Galloway.

GALLOWAY : I couldn't trust myself to stay. If I played this thing, my career would be over. I've played butlers in my day, tramps, murderers, swindlers, and fools—but never a lecherous old man !

LINDA (*genuinely astounded*) : Lecherous ! How can you say that ! (*With exaltation*) He's a glorious, courageous man standing just this side of sixty, surging under the last rhythmic leap of

youth in his blood, rebelling at convention——

GALLOWAY : Young woman, there never was such a man.

LINDA : Yes there was—and is.

GALLOWAY : Where ?

LINDA : Everywhere. The world is full of him. You're one ! (*Picking up his manuscript and gesticulating with it.*) And if you don't play this part, Mr. Galloway——

[*The bedroom door opens and GAYL comes in. GAYL might be anywhere from forty-five to fifty. He has all the ease of a man of the world and all the susceptibilities of an artist. He is in a very quiet, grave mood. The moment he enters, LINDA stops short, pretends she was picking up the manuscript in her hand, and returns quietly to the desk, where she goes back to her work.*]

GAYE : Hello, everybody.

EVERYBODY : { Hello.
 { Good afternoon, Mr. Gaye.
 { Hello, Mr. Gaye.

GAYE : Did Benham call, Linda ?

LINDA : Yes, Mr. Gaye. He'll lunch with you to-morrow.

GAYE : Good. Got those letters ready ?

LINDA : Yes, Mr. Gaye. I'm just finishing the cheques.

GAYE : Fine. Well, my kind friends—have you read the manuscript ?

[*Pause.*]

MISS DARLING : It's a superb tragedy. I love it !

GAYE (*with mild surprise*) : Do you really ?

MISS DARLING : Particularly my part. It's such a new attack on the old character of the mistreated wife.

GAYE (*still more surprised*) : Oh—you got that, did you ?

MISS DARLING : Ah, I could read between the lines—a good woman, written faithfully——

GAYE (*gently*) : Right !

MISS DARLING : —but to be played—well—how can I express it—would you say “ unsympathetic ” was the word ?

GAYE (*very gently*) : Miss Darling, you’re amazing.

MISS DARLING : I saw what you were after ! I said to myself, “ This woman must be righteous, and yet hateful.” And—I don’t know whether you saw me in my last play, but every reviewer said I was just poison.

GAYE : Well, Miss Darling—you cheer me up. And you, Dickie—how do you feel about the part of Freddie ?

DICKIE : I don’t want to sound like a yes-man, Mr. Gaye, but it’s the best comedy part I ever read. That is, for me.

GAYE : Comedy ?

DICKIE (*worried*) : It’s supposed to be a comedy part, isn’t it ?

GAYE (*softly*) : Yes—yes . . . But how did you find it out, my boy ?

DICKIE : Why it’s right there in the script. It’s a relief not to have to play just another romantic kid—you know, audiences are getting tired of matinée idols—but now, to play a good looking—you know what I mean——

GAYE : Don’t apologise. You’re good looking——Go on.

DICKIE : Well, what I mean is, to play a young fellow, but to show how *funny* a young fellow can be—that’s something, isn’t it ?

GAYE : It is, Dickie It is. But do you suppose we can ever get them to laugh at you ?

DICKIE Now you're kidding.

GAYE : No—no. I'm just a battered and bruised veteran of the theatre. I just wonder if they'll laugh at Romeo.

GALLOWAY If they don't laugh at *him*, they'll laugh at *me*.

MISS DARLING And if they laugh at Mr. Galloway, they'll love *me*—and *that* would ruin the play

[Pause.

GAYL . You know, I've been through the throes of nineteen productions, I've worked with more actors than I can remember—but never in all my life have I met three actors as brilliant as you ! I want to thank you here and now for a new experience, no matter what happens to the play.

MISS DARLING Oh, I think the play has a wonderful chance.

[Pause.

GAYE : What do you think, Galloway ?

GALLOWAY (*feeling his way*) Well—I can't quite—the old fellow puzzles me. I suppose I'm stupid—

GAYE (*disarmingly*) : No—you're not stupid at all. The old fellow puzzles me, too. Please go on.

GALLOWAY Well, take the love scene in the first act—where he tells the girl what she means to him—

GAYE : It bothers you, does it ?

GALLOWAY A little.

GAYE : I was just re-reading it in my bedroom
It bothers me a lot.

DICKIE (*courageously*) : I think it's beautifully
written.

GAYE : So do I, Dickie. I think it's the best
writing I've ever done.

GALLOWAY . I'm not criticising the writing—
I just wonder if I—you know, after all I *am*
sixty—in fact I'm a little over sixty—and me
making ardent love to a young girl and frankly
admitting that my wife has never done an
unjust thing in her life —

GAYE (*nodding*) : I agree with you, Galloway.

GALLOWAY : What ?

GAYE : I agree with you.

GALLOWAY (*a bit flustered*) :—On the other
hand, there's a poetic something in the play—
and if a man can catch it with a high heart,
with a grandeur of soul—

GAYE : That's what I thought when I wrote it
I'm fifty-one myself ; I can smell sixty. And
when you're sixty, you're an old man. Personally
it doesn't terrify me. I've had a great time
married, divorced, had sweethearts—no child-
ren, but nineteen plays—not a bad substi-
tute. . . . If I behaved like that fellow, I'd con-
sider myself an idiot.—You see, I tried to catch
the poetry of a man facing old age. I tried
the impossible. Poetry is young or it's no good.
I visualised a man with guts enough to be un-
afraid of seeming ridiculous—surging under the
last rhythmic leap of youth in his blood. . .
But I'm getting my doubts. You see—it all
depends on the actor who plays the part. If he
can catch the imagination of the audience—

GALLOWAY : I've played Shakespeare, you
know.

GAYE : And very well, too.

GALLOWAY : Gaye—I think I'd like to try it. I'm beginning to get what you're after

GAYE (*sadly*) . Galloway, I'm an awfully clever fellow—I talked Benham into liking this play—the shrewdest producer on Broadway—

MISS DARLING : That's fine. Then you can talk audiences into liking it.

GAYE . That's not so easy.

GALLOWAY It's worth trying.

MISS DARLING Steven Gaye's first tragedy !

GALLOWAY. Frank Galloway, at the height of his—maturity, experiments with a new value !

GAYE (*irrelevantly*) . How's Mrs Galloway ?

GALLOWAY Fine.

GAYE . Haven't you got a couple of children ?

GALLOWAY Three The youngest is twenty-four

GAYE (*handing it to him*) Take a script home with you—read it to the family Sleep on it. You do the same, Miss Darling—(*he hands her a manuscript*)—read it to your—

MISS DARLING I live with my sister, at the moment

GAYE Good Read it to her. And Dickie—take it down to the tennis club and get some of the boys in the locker room to listen. See what red-blooded young America thinks of it. (*In the meantime they all have risen—GAYE herding them out*) And then, in a day or two, let's get together again and see how we feel about it.

THE THREE { All right.
 { Good-bye, Mr. Gaye.
 { I'm sure we're going to love it.

GAYE . Good-bye, and thank you all

DICKIE (*lingering a moment*) : 'Bye, Miss Brown

LINDA (*who is folding letters—without looking up*)
Good-bye

[*They go* GAYE stands quietly smiling at the door through which they have gone Then he turns thoughtfully and drops on to the sofa

GAYE . Linda

LINDA Yes ?

GAYE Finished with the cheques ?

LINDA Almost

GAYE They can wait (*She puts the letters and cheques aside and gets out her notebook*) Got a script there ? (*She picks up a manuscript*) Read me the first-act love scene

LINDA (*reads as he picks up another manuscript from a table nearby and silently reads with her*)
"I'm old enough to be your father—almost old enough to be your grandfather"

GAYE (*interrupts*) I'll read it You read the girl's part (*Reads—with feeling*) "I'm old enough to be your father—almost old enough to be your grandfather I'm sixty In five years do you know what I'll be ? Sixty-five—When I was young, don't you think I wanted you ? You just didn't happen to be around, that's all You came thirty years late Do you think I'm going to let Time cheat me ? You came late—but not too late. I want the five best years of your life , but I'll give you my five best years for them And when it's over, it will be easy for you—because I'll be too old to suffer . And you'll be thirty"

LINDA (*reads—but is she merely reading ?*) : "I .
I'll be a queen"

GAYE (*reads*) . "Think of all I've saved up for you—the accumulation of the years—all the trails I've travelled so I can show you the

scenery—the wines I bottled so you can taste them now—the bitterness I suffered so I could distil a sweetness fine enough for you. You'll be giving me your youth—but I'll be giving you my life." . . . Can you imagine Galloway saying that?

LINDA: Yes, I can.

GAYE: So can I, as a matter of fact. But when you actually *see* him—or any other old man—

LINDA: It would make me never want to look at a young man again.

GAYE: No, Linda—no. Imagine Galloway alone in a room with Genevieve Lang. Imagine five hundred people pecking through the transom while he talks like that.

LINDA: I couldn't. They'd uptoe away, ashamed of themselves for eavesdropping.

GAYE: Not when they've paid a three-dollar scale for their tickets, they wouldn't. They'd *leer*, they'd sneer; they'd think: "The old boob, why doesn't he settle down in a rocking chair with his silver-haired wife and dandle his grandchildren on his knee?"—and then they'd *vawn*, between dirty laughs.

LINDA: I hate audiences.

GAYE: You mustn't hate audiences, Linda. Hate human beings if you want to, but not audiences. People are drab, they're petty, they spend their days serving each other and loathing each other. But in the evening, after they have dined, when they get into street cars, subways and taxis and come together in the theatre, when the lights go out and the footlights go on—in other words, when they become an audience—they cease being human: they become divine. I am a playwright—life is nothing to me. It belongs to the workman, to the poet, to the politician. I worship at one

shrine, the theatre. I must be true to one God—my audience. . . . What are you writing?

LINDA : What you just said. You might use it in a play.

GAYE : I'm afraid it's no good. A little too smooth and superficial—and besides, I really don't mean it. Don't cross it out ! You might as well type it. I may write about a smooth, superficial playwright some day.

[FLOGDELL, *the butler*, enters. FLOGDELL has a distinguished bearing and is in his late fifties.

FLOGDELL : Miss Genevieve Lang is calling, sir.

GAYE : You mean—downstairs ?

FLOGDELL . Yes, sir.

GAYE (*to LINDA*) : Did she telephone ?

LINDA : No, Mr. Gaye.

GAYE : Show her up. (FLOGDELL starts. *Thinking*) Flogdell, has Miss Lang ever been here before ?

FLOGDELL . No, sir. The last time we saw her was when we were living at the St. Regis. That was four years ago, sir.

GAYE : Do you think we'll like her for the part ?

FLOGDELL : I think she is eminently suitable, sir. She has unction, technique, she'll fill the balcony——

GAYE : In that case, shall we show her up ?

FLOGDELL : Very well, sir. (FLOGDELL goes.)

[*Pause.*

GAYE : Linda.

LINDA : Yes, Mr. Gaye.

GAYE : Suppose you type that little speech—and finish those letters.

LINDA : All right. (*She starts out.*)

GAYE . And, Linda—(*she pauses*)—put in front of that speech what *you* said, “I hate audiences” And start my speech—“You mustn’t hate audiences,” etcetera

[*As he talks, LINDA scribbles in her notebook*

LINDA I’ve got it

[LINDA goes out to the ante-room GAYE sinks back on the sofa and starts lighting a cigarette I LOGDEIL holds open the door, and GENEVIEVE LANG comes in She is a very attractive young woman, smartly dressed Her face is neither too sweet not too hard She brings a play manuscript with her As I LOGDEIL announces “Miss Lang,” GAYE tries to unscramble himself from the sofa I LOGDEIL goes

GENEVIEVE Don’t get up Just stay as you are Now lie back, and smoke—and let me look at you—(*she steps back*) and don’t say anything

What a nice room—and the nicest time of the day—and pretty soon I may ask for a cup of tea—but just now I’m going to enjoy the view, the books, the furniture (*sits*)—and the second nicest man I ever knew

[*They smile at each other for a silent moment.*

GAYE Hello, GENEVIEVE

GENEVIEVE Hello, Steven

[*Another smiling silence*

GAYE . Who’s the first nicest ?

GENEVIEVE I knew him four years ago—his name was Steven Gaye (*She takes off her hat and settles back*) What made you think of me for this part, Steven ?

GAYE Frankly, it wasn’t my idea : it was Benham’s.

GENEVIEVE But you consented ?

GAYE Why shouldn’t I ? You’re one hell of an actress.

GENEVIEVE : Thank you. It's one hell of a part.

GAYE (*suspiciously*) : But——?

GENEVIEVE (*earnestly*) : Don't you dye your hair a little, Steven ?

GAYE : Yes. Can you tell ?

GENEVIEVE : No. (*suddenly*) You're not married, are you ?

GAYE : No, Genevieve. I'm a one-divorce man. (*They sit quietly for a moment.*) Pause.

GENEVIEVE : What ?

GAYE : I said pause. I was mentally writing this scene—wondering when the plot would enter.

GENEVIEVE : You have betrayed me. I am about to be the mother of your child. If you don't marry me, I'll kill you.

GAYE (*with a sigh*) : Ah, if it were only as simple as that. . . . (*Pause.*) Whatever happened four years ago, anyway ?

GENEVIEVE : Now don't tell me you forgot.

GAYE : You never told me how you really felt. Did you hate me very much ?

GENEVIEVE : Hate you ? I loathed you. You broke my heart.

GAYE : That's nonsense. It's impossible to break the heart of a young, beautiful and healthy woman.

GENEVIEVE : I was insane over you.

GAYE : And I was absolutely mad about you.

GENEVIEVE : I don't believe it, and you'll never make me believe it.

GAYE : All right. Let's forget it. (*Pause.*) Now tell me how bad my play is.

GENEVIEVE : Well—the play is beautiful, but I don't need to tell you that. You write your

women awfully well. Funny—that you should be so stupid about them in life

GAYE (*annoyed*) : Will you listen to me once ?

GENEVIEVE : What good will it do ?

GAYE . It'll amuse you

GENEVIEVE . All right.

GAYE : Now We were all set to go to Paris—I had my steamship reservations—

GENEVIEVE And I had mine

GAYE . We were to meet at midnight on the boat

GENEVIEVE . Right.

GAYE At ten o'clock, as I'm doing my last bit of packing, I get the most hilarious idea of my life.

GENEVIEVE You mean a *play* idea ?

GAYE . What other kind is there ?

GENEVIEVE (*sighing*) . Go on

GAYE . All right If I didn't write it then while it was hot, I'd never get it down Now, I'm not temperamental, but there *is* such a thing as inspiration

GENEVIEVE : Couldn't you have sent a message, a telegram—?

GAYE : *No !* . . . I got the public stenographer out of bed—*she* never forgave me, either—and I dictated until seven the next morning.

GENEVIEVE You had enough sense to shut off your telephone, didn't you ?

GAYE : I always do that automatically when I start to work But there was nothing to keep you from answering my wireless I'd have come on the next boat. What happened when you got my message ?

GENEVIEVE : I jumped into the ocean and never was seen again.

GAYE (*cheerfully*) : Well, it's all over now, isn't it ?

GENEVIEVE : Completely. . . . (*dreamily*) Steven, you really were a very attractive man.

GAYE : What's the matter with me now ?

GENEVIEVE : You're nice.

GAYE : But not as nice as I was then, eh ?

GENEVIEVE : Well, you're four years older.

GAYE (*piqued*) : So are you, my dear.

GENEVIEVE : When you're four years older than twenty-two, you're still a young woman. But when you're four years older than—

GAYE (*blandly*) : Forty-seven.

GENEVIEVE : Steven dear—you forget—you told me at the time you were forty-eight.

GAYE (*more blandly*) : Did I ? . . . I was lying—I was forty-nine.

GENEVIEVE : That makes you fifty-three.

GAYE : And revolting ?

GENEVIEVE : Of course not, Steven. You'll never be revolting. But after all, fifty-three isn't quite the age to make a girl's heart go pitty-pat.

GAYE : Speaking impersonally—as an elderly man of the world to a young woman of the world—at what age would you say a man ceased being—well—just where would you draw the pitty-pat line ?

GENEVIEVE : Roughly at forty-nine.

[*Pause.*]

GAYE (*slowly*) : So that's what you don't like about my play.

GENEVIEVE : Your play can't help it—it's that kind of play . . . "Old Love."

GAYE : And I can't help it— I'm that kind of man—old man.

GENEVIEVE : But, after all, Steven—what's my opinion?—audiences may like it.

GAYE : But *you'll* have none of it.

GENEVIEVE : I'm afraid not.

GAYE (*this hurts*) : And none of me.

GENEVIEVE : Now, Steven !

GAYE : What are you going to do—wait for another play to come along ?

GENEVIEVE : Maybe. Or I might just go away.

GAYE : Where ?

GENEVIEVE : Anywhere. I'm mildly insane, didn't you know ? Two years ago I suddenly just had to see South Africa. Allow me to inform you that South Africa is beautiful.

GAYE : Did you go alone ?

GENEVIEVE : I started alone.

[*Pause.*]

GAYE : Have you ever been to Finland ?

GENEVIEVE : No.

GAYE : Neither have I. I hear it's amazing—full of blue eyes and green trees and yellow flowers.

GENEVIEVE : And in the winter the air is so dry you can walk naked in the snow.

[*Pause. He comes over to her.*]

GAYE : Let's go to Finland.

GENEVIEVE (*smiling*) : What about your play ?

GAYE (*with feeling*) : I hate the damn play.

[*She looks at him intently. She draws him to her and gives him a long kiss. Then she looks at him with a little smile.*]

GENEVIEVE : I wanted to see what it would be like.

GAYE : How was it ?

GENEVIEVE : Not bad. (*Pause.*) Do you really mean that about Finland ?

GAYE : Passionately.

GENEVIEVE : Do you expect me to believe that I, or any other woman, could make you hate your play ?

GAYE : Of course not. I knew the play was all wrong before you came.

GENEVIEVE : Steven Gaye, I don't believe you.

GAYE (*slowly*) : Will you believe me in Finland ?

GENEVIEVE (*idly*) : I happen to know that the *Île de France* leaves to-night.

GAYE (*thinks a moment*) : Fine ! (*He gets up excitedly and goes to the door.*) We can change at Southampton. (*Calls*) Linda !

LINDA'S voice : Yes, Mr. Gaye.

GENEVIEVE (*quickly, in a low tone*) : What do you want her for ?

GAYE : Make reservations.

GENEVIEVE : I'd rather not.

GAYE : All right. (*Calls*) Never mind, Linda.

GENEVIEVE : Never confide in secretaries. I once got into an awful lot of trouble through the secretary of a friend of mine. And besides, *another* friend of mine is an official of the French Line.

GAYE : Good ! What time does the *Île de France* sail ?

GENEVIEVE : Ten.

GAYE : Got your passport ?

GENEVIEVE : Always.

GAYE : Can you get packed by ten ?

GENEVIEVE : I can try.

GAYE : You're lovely. (*With feeling*) Shall we, once more ? (*They look at each other a moment—the edge is there : they kiss.*) Okay ?

GENEVIEVE : Marvellous.

GAYE : Heart go pitty-pat ?

GENEVIEVE (*stares at him, getting it. She steps back, hocked and smiling*) : You fiend. You devil. So you were play-acting—just to prove that a man past fifty could be——

GAYE : Romantic. Did I do it well ?

GENEVIEVE : You had *me* fooled.

GAYE (*himself a little breathless*) : No—not really !

GENEVIEVE (*still shaken*) : Well—couldn't you see ?

GAYE : Yes—but after all, you're an excellent actress.

GENEVIEVE : Good-bye, Steven. (*She gives him her hand.*) I'm sure you'll get somebody very good for the part. I've had a delightful time.

GAYE : So have I.

GENEVIEVE : Believe it or not, I was ready to go to Finland.

GAYE : Genevieve—this is absolutely preposterous—but I'm dying to go to Finland with you. (GENEVIEVE *stares at him.*) On my word of honour——

GENEVIEVE : As a playwright ?

GAYE : No. As a gentleman.

[*They examine each other carefully, excitedly. They kiss.*]

GENEVIEVE (*really worked up*) : I'll get the tickets. I'll go right back to my hotel. What time is it, Steven ?

GAYE : Why it's—my watch is slow—it should be——

[*At the same moment, LINDA comes in from the ante-room with a glass of water and a small paper box on a tray.*]

LINDA : Excuse me. Your five o'clock pill, Mr. Gaye. (*As she speaks, LINDA puts it on a table.*)

GAYE : Thanks, Linda.

[LINDA goes. He stares a moment at GENEVIEVE, who smiles amusedly at him. Then he goes over, picks up the box of pills, and drops it into the wastebasket. He goes to GENEVIEVE, wants to embrace her again

GENEVIEVE (*moving swiftly to the door*) : No—no I must rush.

GAYE (*following*) : Will we have time to dine?

GENEVIEVE : I'll telephone you. *Au revoir.*

GAYE : *Auf wiedersehen.*

[She goes. GAYE is alone. He paces up and down a moment. He presses the bell. He goes to the desk, sits, looks through a drawer for his passport, takes it out and sticks it into his pocket. FLOGDELL enters.

GAYE : Flogdell.

FLOGDELL : Yes, sir.

GAYE : I'm leaving for Finland to-night.

FLOGDELL : Very well, sir.

GAYE : Will you pack my things?

FLOGDELL : At once, sir. (*FLOGDELL starts out.*)

GAYE : Flogdell.

FLOGDELL : Yes, sir.

GAYE : Isn't it exciting?

FLOGDELL : Very, sir.—At this time of the year, you will find the climate still mild in Finland. The days will be getting shorter, but there will be autumn flowers. I think you will require your complete wardrobe, for Helsingfors is a remarkably cosmopolitan centre, and you will also find—

GAYE (*tenderly*) : Flogdell—

FLOGDELL : Yes, sir?

GAYE : I shall miss you !

FLOGDELL : Thank you, sir.

[FLOGDELL goes. GAYE paces up and down again.

GAYE (at the door—calls) : Linda ! (LINDA comes in with her pencil and notebook.) Get Mr. Benham, will you ? (LINDA starts for the telephone.) No—better not. He'll talk my head off. Take a letter. (She sits.) Dear Bill. When you get this, comma, I'll be on the *Île de France* on the first lap to Finland. Period. (LINDA stares at him.) Forget *Old Love*, dash, and save yourself a lot of headaches. Period. Nobody cares about that old fool anyway. . . . What do you think of it, Linda ! I'm quitting ! I'm going to live ! For the first time in my life I've stopped being a playwright—I'm a man, that's what I am, and I don't mean maybe.

LINDA (reading—a little viciously) : Nobody cares about that old fool anyway.

GAYE : Yes ! Period. Bill, Bill, Bill, dash, I've retired. Period. . . . I really have, Linda. What a wonderful feeling ! (He picks up one of the copies of the play and drops it into the wastebasket. Indicating a row of books on a shelf.) There are my collected works, nineteen comedies. I'm a success, and I've got money. Why do I have to write tragedies ? You stick your head in the clouds, what does it get you—a crown of thorns. You put your feet on the ground, what does that get you—bunions. . . . Make a note. Advertisement. Apartment for rent. Eight rooms, two storeys, view of East River. I've retired. . . . What's the last thing I said ?

LINDA (reads) : Bill, Bill, Bill, dash. I've retired. Period.

GAYE : I've never lived before. Period. I'm going to do all the things I was always about to do. Period. I'll learn golf. Exclamation point. It keeps you out in the open air. Period. Then there's all those books I was going to read some

day. Period. And all the people I was going to meet, dash. Think of it, colon, you could kill all the actors, writers and directors in the world, comma, and there'd still be fishermen in Capri comma, peasants in France, comma, bandits in China. Period. And I wouldn't be surprised if I found romance in Finland. Two exclamation points. . . . Why, Bill, this is something you ought to do, too. Period. To us Nature has never been anything but a set against which dramas have to be played. Period . . . Just think of it, Linda. *I don't give a damn about that first-act love scene. I don't give a damn about any scene. I never have to worry again about lines, characters, transitions, curtains—will this get a laugh, will that get a tear? I don't have to worry about audiences. To hell with audiences. I've retired ! . . . What have you got ?*

LINDA (*reads*) : To us Nature has never been anything but a set against which dramas have to be played. Period.

GAYE : I'm afraid this letter'll be over Benham's head. . . . Kill it. I'll send him a wireless from the boat. (*LINDA shuts her book. GAYE drops down on the sofa. There is a long pause. Very sweetly.*) And, Linda—you're discharged—with my compliments, my gratitude, my affection. . . . Now, we'll have to give you a nice present. What would you like most in the world ?

LINDA : Nothing, thank you.

GAYE : Come, come, Linda. I'm serious. Would you like a car, a trip to Europe, maybe a trousseau ? Haven't you got a boy friend ?

LINDA : No.

GAYE : Don't be silly. You're a fine-looking girl. You'd make any man a splendid wife. Tell you what—write yourself a cheque for six months' salary. (*LINDA, after a moment's thought, goes to the desk, takes the cheque book out and begins to write.*)

That's it. You retire, too ! Here's an idea : go down to Saks' and order yourself a complete outfit. Charge it to me. Then take a trip somewhere. Take your mother along.

LINDA : I haven't got a mother.

GAYE : Oh, of course. I forgot. I'm sorry . . .
(*With real enthusiasm.*) Take a girl friend along. Two nice young girls, Honolulu, ukuleles—Yellowstone Park, cowboys and Indians—see Antica first. . . Or maybe Havana. It's romantic—(*she comes over and hands him the cheque with a pen. He begins to sign and then stops.*) What's this?—forty-one dollars and sixty-five cents?

LINDA (*in an icy voice*) : To-day is the fourth day of the week. My salary is sixty a week—four days make forty—and I paid a dollar sixty-five for that parcel post package yesterday.

GAYE (*puzzled*) : What's the matter, Linda? What have I done?

LINDA : Nothing is the matter.

GAYE : You're angry.

LINDA : No—I'm accurate. You've discharged me, haven't you?

GAYE : Well, uh—that's not quite the way to—

LINDA (*harshly*) : Yes or no?

GAYE : Why--yes.

LINDA : I have finished your letters, your notes, your telephone calls. You'll find everything filed away. All your manuscripts in order, all the bills for the month paid. The pencils are sharpened, the typewriter is covered, the desk is shut. My working day is over. . . . You owe me forty-one dollars and sixty-five cents.

GAYE (*hurt*) : My child, I owe you far more than that. As a matter of fact, strictly speaking, you're entitled to two weeks' notice.

LINDA (*with cutting finality*) : You gave me a month's vacation last summer on double pay—that covers everything. . . . Here's the cheque. (*She moves it toward him on the table.*) Will you please sign it? (*She tosses notebook into the chair and goes coolly and briskly to the ante-room. He looks after her, annoyed. He picks up the cheque, is about to tear it, then reconsiders and signs it. LINDA enters in her coat, putting on her hat as she walks. He is holding the cheque in his hand as she comes over to him.*) May I have it, please? (*Silently he gives it to her.*) Thank you.

GAYE (*still puzzled*) : You're welcome.

[*She folds it.*]

LINDA : Now we're through—aren't we?

GAYE : Why—it looks that way.

LINDA : You're no longer my employer.

GAYE : No.

LINDA : And I'm no longer your—secretary.

GAYE : Right.

LINDA : We're two human beings together.

GAYE : Yes, Linda.

LINDA : A man and a woman.

GAYE : A man and a woman.

LINDA (*putting the cheque in her purse*) : Well—before I say good-bye, I want you to know that I love you. I want you to know that the three years and two months I've spent with you have been the most wonderful, painful, happiest years I've ever had or hope to have. You hardly knew I was on earth—but you've given me more than you could have given your wife, or any other woman, or your friends, or your audiences. I had you when you were alone. You've spoiled every man I know for me. You did that in the first month. I don't think I'll ever forget

a single look of your face, a single word you said. . . . You've done a terrible thing : you opened my eyes and my heart—and you never touched me. It hurt—every bit of it hurt—how could it not hurt, it was so beautiful !—And if you think I can walk out of this house quietly—that you can smile me away with money and a few new dresses—if you think I can walk out of here without wanting to kill you, without wanting to cut my initials into every day you're going to live, you're crazy. . . . Good-bye—and try to forget me ! (*She starts out.*)

GAYE Hey ! (*He rushes over and takes her by the arm. He leads her slowly back into the room. She is sobbing. Looking at her very thoughtfully.*) Let me look at you (*Quietly*) You strange creature. . . . You lovely creature. (*She makes a move. He takes her arm.*) Don't go away !—let me look at you some more. I'm not patronising you. I'm seeing you. You're grand ! . . . If I only were thirty-five, or forty, instead of fifty-three. . . . What do you want of me, Linda ?

LINDA Nothing

GAYE . That's not true

LINDA (*breaking*) . I know it's not true.

GAYE : What do you want of me, Linda ?

LINDA I don't know . . . Everything . . . Anything

GAYE : Sit down. (*He gently leads her to the sofa.*) Of course . . . Of course . . . Most natural thing in the world. Where do you live, Linda ?

LINDA : West Tenth Street . . . f l c

GAYE : Apartment ?

LINDA Yes.

GAYE : And your parents are dead.—You went to college or something, didn't you ?

LINDA · Three years.

GAYE (*to himself*) . Why certainly A girl like that—I come into her life—and it happens Suddenly, like a banquet, she gets Broadway literature, personalities, and me Linda, I know you won't believe it—but you'll get over this

LINDA (*despairingly*) Will I ?

GAYE · Yes, you will You're young, and you made yourself ready The world is full of fascinating people much more fascinating than I am

LINDA . You know that isn't so

GAYE (*slowly*) I suppose there's something in what you say (*Turns to her with curiosity*) Am I physically attractive ?

LINDA Yes

GAYE Funny, when you get right down to it I can't think off-hand of a man —you know—who *could* make you forget me I'm beginning to see what a spot you're in ' I *am* a unique combination— witty, sensitive, imaginative worldly, gay—and yet with a feeling for tragedy And I know myself too well, I've been around too much, to deny that I'm charming

LINDA You're wonderful

GAYE Dammit —I know I am ' But Linda, my sweet, I don't love you—I don't love anybody

LINDA (*suffering*) . I know that You don't have to tell me—I know that

GAYE · And I *can't* love you Suppose, for the sake of argument, I fell in love with you It would be worse Picture a man of fifty-three—why, it's like the situation in *Old Love* . (*He stops, completely smitten with an idea*) Oh, my God . . . (*He turns to her, staring at her but not seeing her*)

(springs up.) Linda ¹—*(Excitedly)* Get your notebook *(In a daze, she obeys, picking up notebook and pencil where she dropped them. He walks up and down the room in great excitement. She sits, waiting for dictation.)* Ready?

LINDA Ready

GAYF *(thrilled, boyish)* God, Linda, this is marvellous ¹ *(He comes over to her)* How can I ever repay you ² Do you realise what you've done for me ³ *(She looks up at him, bewildered)* Angel—you've saved my play ⁴ *(He turns away abruptly and begins pacing up and down)* Get this. *(She poised her pencil)* It's a cinch, Linda. Why didn't I think of it before ⁵ She makes love to him—get it ⁶ How beautifully simple ⁷ She makes love to him. It whitewashes the old boy completely. God bless you, Linda. Happy ⁸ . . . *(She does not—cannot answer.)* I'm in love with the play all over again—aren't you ⁹

LINDA I always was

GAYF *(he goes quickly toward where she stood when she said good-bye, concentrating)* Now let's see—you were standing right here . . . *(He dictates slowly as he tries to remember)* "Good-bye, but before I go I want you to know I love you" *(Linda now gets it. It's like a slap in the face—but after a moment, she writes it down)* . . . Even the good-bye idea is great—what a build-up ¹ . . . Do you remember what you said after that ²

LINDA *(she honestly tries to remember—after a moment, hairs in her eyes)* . I can't remember a thing .

GAYF Doesn't matter *(Dictates)* "The years I've spent with you—" *(He pauses—glances only, impersonally, at LINDA)* I'm going to make her a secretary ¹ Whole first act in his office—
it'll work out—we can do it in three days . . .
What did I say ²

LINDA (*reads slowly in a controlled voice*) : " Good-bye, but before I go I want you to know I love you. The years I've spent with you——"

GAYE (*picks up the rhythm from her and goes on—very dramatically*) : " The years I've spent with you have been pure hell, every hour, every second, every day. Period. But I'd rather have that hell with you than ten heavens with any other man. Period. . . ." Lousy ! Too melodramatic. You said it better. I'm too excited. Kill that last speech. (*She crosses it out.*) . . . All right. Now let's see . . . (*He begins to remember a phrase—out of a great silent concentration he begins slowly to dictate.*) " You've done a terrible thing to me. You opened my eyes and my heart—and you never touched me."

LINDA (*in pain and suddenly not writing*) : I said that ! That's what I said !

GAYE (*groping and finding more words*) : " It hurt—every bit of it hurt. How could it not hurt, it was so beautiful. . . ."

LINDA (*still not writing—shaken, half to herself*) : I said that, too.

GAYE : " And if you think I can walk out of here without wanting to kill you . . ." (*He becomes aware of her. Screams*) What's the matter—aren't you writing it down !

LINDA (*managing to pull herself together ; quietly*) : Give it to me again.

GAYE (*rapidly, trying not to lose it*) : " You've opened my eyes and my heart—and you never touched me. Period. You spoiled every man I know for me. Period. You did that in the first month." (*LINDA writes as he talks.*) What goes after that ?

LINDA (*in hell*) : " It hurt—every bit of it hurt—how could it not hurt, it was so beautiful——"

GAYE : Got it down ?

LINDA (*in a shaking voice*) : Yes, I've got it down.

GAYE (*suddenly remorsefully aware of her, looks at her a quiet moment*) : Linda, I'm a brute—but that shouldn't be news to you . . .

[*The telephone rings.*]

LINDA (*rises and picks it up—into the telephone, trying to control her voice*) . Hello. . . . Yes. (*She covers the mouthpiece.*) It's Genevieve Lang.

[GAYE hesitates a moment then comes over and takes the telephone from LINDA. He puts his hand over the mouthpiece.]

GAYE : Linda, dear—do you love this play as much as I do ?

LINDA : More

GAYE . Do you think this new scene is going to make a difference ?

LINDA : Yes, I do

GAYE : . . . Will you type it ? (*LINDA numbly nods her head and goes out to the ante-room shutting the door behind her. GAYE looks at the telephone with dread, then he plunges*) Hello, Genevieve. . . . (*In dismay*) You did ? . . . Yes. . . . Yes . . . The what ?—the Bridal Suite ! . . . (*Takes a deep breath.*) Well—I'll tell you, Genevieve—I don't know if you'll quite understand . . . No, no, no. Listen. You'll go through the ceiling when you hear this—but, on the other hand, it means a wonderful part for you—(*He stops as if cut by a whip. He stands stricken as he listens to a harangue.*) Yes. . . . Yes. . . . Yes, but—(*finally, in a defiant humming-up*) Yes, Genevieve—that's exactly what I'm trying to tell you ! (*Talking very fast*) And all I ask is that you let me read you that scene when it's written. It changes everything—now listen, Genevieve, I switch the scene from Galloway to you—it's your scene, and at the

same time it makes that old fellow as romantic, as colourful, as exciting as any—Genevieve ! Hello ! Hello ! . . . (*With mixed emotion he puts the telephone back. He pauses a moment and then goes to the wall and rings for FLOGDELL. He puts his passport back into the desk. FLOGDELL appears in the doorway.*) Flogdell.

FLOGDELL : Yes, sir.

GAYE : I'm not going to Finland.

FLOGDELL (*after a split-second's hesitation*) : Very well, sir.

[FLOGDELL goes. GAYE stands quietly. . . . Now suddenly GAYE hastens to the wastebasket, takes the manuscript out and puts it on the small table, unearths the little box of pills, takes one of them and follows it by a drink of water from the glass which LINDA had put on the table.]

CURTAIN

ACT II

SCENE I

A morning in May.

Same as Act I except there is a piano in the room, LINDA'S framed photograph is among the others, one of the lampshades, hand-painted, is new, and all the furniture has been rearranged with a woman's touch.

The stage is empty. The door opens and FLOGDELL shows GALLOWAY in. GALLOWAY is in last night's evening clothes, slightly bedrugged. He looks sick and miserable.

GALLOWAY : Are you sure Mr. Gaye won't be back soon ?

FLOGDELL : He didn't say, Mr. Galloway.

GALLOWAY : It doesn't matter. I just came to use the telephone. . . . What a night, what a night ! Flogdell—I danced three girls under the table. Would you believe it ?

FLOGDELL : *Old Love* seems to have made a new man of you, sir.

GALLOWAY : But in the morning, one wants to go home. And one can't very well go home like this—I mean, one should telephone first, don't you think ?

FLOGDELL : The problem, sir, is what to say.

GALLOWAY : Precisely. I stopped in a telephone booth, and people stared at me—after all, I'm a well-known figure.—And evening clothes, at eleven on a Sunday morning, do not constitute a very good disguise.

FLOGDELL : Begging your pardon, sir, this is Monday.

GALLOWAY : Monday ! Then where was I Sunday ? Oh, Flogdell, I'm a very sick man.

FLOGDELL : May I suggest a cup of coffee, sir ? For jaded nerves or any ills of the morning after, there is nothing so heartening, so soothing to the spirit as a fragrant, savoury cup——

GALLOWAY : Don't advertise it, Flogdell—just get it.

FLOGDELL : Very well, Mr. Galloway.

[FLOGDELL goes. GALLOWAY sits for a moment with his head buried unhappily in his hands. Then he rises and screws up enough courage to go to the telephone. He dials it. Into the telephone.

GALLOWAY : Hello, Annie. This is Mr. Galloway. (*In a confidential voice*) Has Mrs. Galloway been trying to get me ? . . . She hasn't ? Are you sure ? . . . Thank you. Will you tell her I am on the telephone ? . . . (*Frightened*) She won't ? (*With bravado*) Well, you tell her I've been sick two days at the home of Mr. Gaye—— . . . She'll have to believe it ! . . . (*He puts his hand over the mouthpiece and rehearses his little speech—with a superb air.*) Now, Roberta—as you know, we gave our last New York performance Saturday night. Well—after six months of an arduous stellar rôle, the sudden relaxation following the realisation that I had a full week of rest before going into the Chicago run caused a natural collapse—— What ? How can you call me that—me, the father of our—— *What ! !* Roberta, you'll regret talking to me like this !—(*He takes his hand off the mouthpiece—in his original frightened voice.*) Yes, Annie. . . . She won't come to the telephone ? . . . All right, Annie. (*A very frail, sickish old man, he hangs up the telephone and goes to a chair. In the meantime, FLOGDELL has entered with coffee on a tray. GALLOWAY turns to the coffee like a dying man and takes a gulp.*) That feels good. Thank you. . . . Flogdell, I've decided to stay here.

FLOGDELL : Here, sir ?

GALLOWAY : I'm sleepy. I'm tired. Prepare the spare bedroom

FLOGDELL I'm sorry, but I'm afraid I cannot do anything so bizarre without Mr. Gaye's permission, sir.

GALLOWAY : Well, where is Mr. Gaye ?

FLOGDELL I don't know whether he'd want me to say, sir.

GALLOWAY (*desperately*) I stand before you a diving man—cast out of my home, disowned by my wife—(*suddenly shifting and in less feeble tones*)—and for what ? Is it my fault that I have created a new romantic type ? Can I help it if women fancy me ?

FLOGDELL These things are chemistry, sir.

GALLOWAY . Don't change the subject As I was saying, you behold before you a man living in hell, who frantically cries to you, "Where is Steven Gaye ? " How can you refuse to answer ?

FLOGDELL (*takes a deep breath*) : I'll chance it. He has gone to call on Miss Linda.

GALLOWAY . Linda Brown ? . . . Call her apartment.

FLOGDELL : I don't like to do that, sir

GALLOWAY : Why ? Who is Linda Brown ? An insignificant little accident of the theatre—type casting !—Did you read the reviews ? Did she get a single good notice ?

FLOGDELL : She didn't get any bad ones, sir.

GALLOWAY : And I—I taught her to act I sweated and slaved over her And what do I get for it ? I'm kicked out of Steven Gaye's house.

FLOGDELL : May I make a suggestion ?

GALLOWAY (*dolefully*) . I wish you would.

FLOGDELL : Have you ever considered a Turkish bath ?

GALLOWAY : No good. That's what I told Mrs. Galloway the last time.

FLOGDELL : I didn't mean it that way, sir. I meant the act itself. The steam, opening the pores—*(the telephone rings. FLOGDELL hesitates)*

GALLOWAY Answer it. It might be Mr. Gaye

FLOGDELL : Yes, sir. *(FLOGDELL goes to the telephone, picks it up Into the telephone.)* Hello . . . Oh, hello, Mr. Schultz. *(To GALLOWAY, who has risen)* It's the grocer, sir

GALLOWAY *(sadly)* : Don't bother to see me out, my good man. *(GALLOWAY goes)*

FLOGDELL *(into the telephone)* : Just a moment *(He waits long enough for GALLOWAY to have gone out of earshot. Then)* Hello, my dear ! . . . Yes—I know—but you mustn't be angry, dear. . . . It's true—yesterday you were the butcher, and last week the laundryman, but, my honey-pot, we have each other. . . . Of course I do, I do, I do. But do you, me ? . . . Say it again . . . *(He lifts his head He hears someone coming In a different voice)* Yes, Mr. Schultz—a dozen eggs *(As LINDA enters.)* Good-bye, Mr. Schultz *(LINDA, in a street costume, looks extremely chic and expensive from head to toe. She comes into the room swiftly, aggressively, with pent-up excitement)* Good morning, Miss Linda. Oh, I'm so glad to see you, Miss Linda.

LINDA Where's Mr. Gaye ?

FLOGDELL : He went to your apartment. Didn't you see him ?

LINDA : How long ago ?

FLOGDELL : About a half hour. He tried all night to get you on the telephone.

LINDA . I know.

FLOGDELL : And he went to your house twice—but apparently you weren't in.

LINDA : He nearly broke down the door.

FLOGDELL : He said he was *going* to break down the door this morning.

LINDA : Flogdell—

FLOGDELL : Yes, Miss Linda?

LINDA : Where did Mr. Gaye dine yesterday?

FLOGDELL : At home, Miss Linda.

LINDA : Alone?

FLOGDELL : Very much alone, Miss Linda. If I may say so, there was an air of melancholy about him, a strange brooding loneliness—and if you will permit me to quote Oscar Wilde—

LINDA : What did Mr. Gaye do all evening?

FLOGDELL . He paced madly up and down this room.

LINDA : Alone?

FLOGDELL : Alone.

LINDA : I don't believe a word you say.

FLOGDELL . I have told you the truth, Miss Linda—on my word of honour as a gentleman's gentleman.

LINDA (*softening for an instant*) : Please, Flogdell—don't be offended. I don't blame you for being loyal to your master. He's been good to me.

FLOGDELL . I may say, simply, that I would die for him.

LINDA : Yes, Flogdell—but suppose he didn't care enough for you to *want* you to die for him.

FLOGDELL : I couldn't imagine such a situation, Miss Linda.

LINDA : Well, it's happened ! And I've come to my things.

FLOGDELL : Your things, Miss Linda ?

LINDA : Yes. My things. There are seven photographs of me in this house. I want them.

FLOGDELL : What else, Miss Linda ?

LINDA : What else ? There's the piano, but he can keep that—that is, if he wants to go on with his lessons. But I want my pictures and my knitting—and—oh yes, this lampshade. I painted it myself—and he never liked it, anyway.

FLOGDELL : Is that all, Miss Linda ?

LINDA : That's all.

FLOGDELL (*taking a deep breath*) : Well, I assume the responsibility of refusing to deliver the articles you name.

LINDA : Then I'll take them !

[She lifts the shade from a lamp on the desk, crosses the room and picks up her framed photograph from the library table. Thus, awkwardly laden and defiant, she stands as GAYE comes into the room. GAYE stops in his tracks at the sight of LINDA. They stare at each other angrily a moment.]

GAYE : Flogdell.

FLOGDELL : Yes, Mr. Gaye.

GAYE : Get out of here.

FLOGDELL : Very well, Mr. Gaye. (*He goes. There is a moment of silence.*)

LINDA : I've come for my things.

GAYE : That's what I expected.

[But neither moves.]

LINDA : Well—haven't you anything to say for yourself ?

GAYE (*astounded*) : Haven't I anything to say for myself ? What, for instance ?

LINDA : Well—for instance : good-bye—I don't love you—and I hope I never see you again. We agreed—didn't we?—to be brutal, to be honest, the moment the moment came.

GAYE (*with weary bewilderment*) : Are you crazy ?

LINDA (*slamming down the lampshade and the photograph on piano and turning on him*) Of course I'm crazy. Don't pretend you just discovered it. And you're crazy. That's why, when a time like this comes, we shouldn't lower ourselves to the level of sanity. I demand that we keep our hate on the same high mountain where you put our love.—Do you know what day yesterday was ? It was the ninth of May Seven months ago yesterday I was nothing to you—and you were everything to me.—You discharged me. I was willing to go. I told you I loved you, but it was an exit speech. I didn't ask for mercy. You pulled me back. *You* begged me to rehearse in your play. I never wanted to be an actress.—Well, I became an actress. Then, on the opening night, you said you fell in love with me. I didn't believe it I knew you too well. And then - then I did believe it - We promised each other it would be breathless and magical, or nothing at all We swore, as we sat in the dawn, that the moment the glory stopped, whoever the glory stopped for would cut like a knife. You said, "The wonder that's in us is our love—and when that wonder goes, let's not live kindly, sweetly, disgustingly, with just each other." Did you or did you not say it ?

GAYE It's rather naively phrased, but I said it.

LINDA : Did you or did you not mean it ?

GAYE . Of course I meant it.

LINDA : Then how could you—how *could* you—yesterday on the seventh monthly anniversary of the day you discharged me—when I had

bought a beautiful evening gown for two hundred and seventy-five dollars just for our dinner together—*how* could you break our date !

[*Pause.*

GAYE : Did you read my note ?

LINDA : Of course I read it.

GAYE : I think it was very clear.

LINDA : What was clear about it ? You walked into my apartment at six-thirty —

GAYE : And I found your young leading man in your bed.

LINDA : And you left.

GAYE : What did you expect me to do ?

LINDA : If you had the least bit of poetry in you, you would have waited for me to come out of the shower.

[*Pause.*

GAYE : Would you have liked it if you had found me standing there ?

LINDA : I would have loved it.

GAYE : You—you would have enjoyed explaining ?

LINDA : Explaining ? I should have refused to explain !

GAYE : That makes everything clear !—I find Dickie Reynolds asleep in your bed. I tactfully pretend nothing has happened, the three of us go out to dinner, and then, after the theatre we all have a little night-cap, go to a hotel, ask for a triple bed, say our prayers, and turn in together !

[*Pause.*

LINDA : Why did you refuse to answer your telephone ?

GAYE : I thought that was covered in my note.

LINDA : Why did you put the note on Dickie's chest ?

GAYE : Oh, it seemed the natural thing to do.

LINDA : Suppose he woke up and read it before I came out ?

GAYE : Oh, can he read ?

LINDA : Beautifully !

[*Pause.*

GAYE : Why did you telephone me if you didn't mind to explain ?

LINDA : I telephoned to thank you for having put me in your show, for having introduced me to the world of the theatre, which I love.

GAYE : Then why did you refuse to answer your telephone when I called you at midnight ?

LINDA : Because I decided I had nothing to thank you for ! You needed me in your play, I made good, and you got just as much out of the whole miserable mess as I did.

[*Pause.*

GAYE : May I ask you a question ?

LINDA : You may.

GAYE : Why are *you* angry with *me* ?

LINDA : I'm not angry at all.

GAYE : What do you call this—a laughing jag ?

LINDA : No. This is despair—because your faith in me has gone—and . . . everything is over.

[*Pause.*

GAYE (*slowly*) : I have all the faith in the world in you. . . . But I know too much about life, about women. You might be an angel straight from heaven, but so long as you're young and I'm old . . . I tell you there is no substitute for youth. (*Suffering.*) Every night, in that play, he

takes you in his arms. Every night, in words that I wrote, his youth calls to you . . . every night—and two matinées a week.

LINDA : You're jealous !

GAYE . Dying of it . . .

LINDA : Couldn't you see the boy was drunk ?

GAYE (*wildly*) : Don't ! No matter what you say, it will be something I said in a similar situation.

LINDA (*coming over to him*) : Steven——

GAYE : Oh, Linda, Linda——

[*They embrace They cling tightly to each other*
LINDA *cries a little After a while* .

LINDA : Steven—do you love me ?

GAYE : What do you think ?

LINDA : I think yes.—And I love you. I'm tired of asking you to marry me. But we must let the world know we belong to each other. Otherwise, why shouldn't a young man come to see me ?—If you're afraid of the word mistress, let's say we're engaged. I'll never sue you for breach of promise.

GAYE . But I *want* young men to come and see you—every one of them. The field is free—that's the way I want it. I didn't buy you in a market place.—And you don't have to tell me what Dickie was doing in your bedroom. I know nothing happened. I'm positive of it. All night long I was telling myself that. The reason I called you on the telephone so many times, and the reason I went to your apartment, was only to tell you that it's all right, and please to forget it.

LINDA : Oh, Steven—darling—let's never do things like this to each other again, shall we

GAYE Never ! (*they are quiet in each others' arms*)
—darling——

LINDA : Yes, dear ?

GAYE : What was it Shakespeare said about men dying, but not for love ?—Well, it might be true about men over twenty-five and men under fifty. . . . But I could die for love of you.

LINDA : . . . I'm so glad.

GAYE : I'm not. I see no peace ahead.

LINDA : Since when do you want peace ?

GAYE : Since I've found adventure.

LINDA : Do you—really ?

GAYE : No, I don't, really.

LINDA : I'm glad, because you're never going to have peace. You're an artist—you're never going to be middle-aged. You're going to stay young until suddenly one day you'll die, and on your death-bed you'll say to the doctor, "What am I dying of ?" And the doctor will say, "Old age, you fool."

GAYE : . . . Darling —

LINDA : Yes, dear ?

GAYE : What did he do—just walk in ?

LINDA : Who ?

GAYE : Dickie.

LINDA : Oh, you angel, haven't I told you about that yet ?

GAYE : Not that I can remember.

LINDA : He walked in unannounced, and very tight. I was surprised—you know, Dickie . . . never drinks or smokes. And I couldn't figure out what he came for, because I don't think I've exchanged more than fifty words with the boy during the six months we've been in the show.—He talked about the traffic, and I talked about the weather—making a grand total of maybe sixty words—and then suddenly,

like a gentleman of the old school, he fell asleep in his chair. Well, it got time for me to dress for dinner, so I went in to dress. When I came out from my shower, there on my bed was your note, and under it was Dickie !

[GAYE brings a little jewel case out of his pocket
He gives it to her shyly.

GAYE : I was going to give that to you yesterday at dinner.

LINDA (*taking the bracelet from the case*) : Oh Steven—it's beautiful ! (*She puts it around her wrist and looks at it.*) I love it ! Steven—we'd better cut out these mon'ly anniversaries what with your buying me jewellery and me buying myself evening gowns, we'll both go broke.

GAYE : Will you live in a garret with me ?

LINDA : I've always wanted to live in a garret
Just you and me——

GAYE : And Flogdell——

LINDA : And the piano. You mustn't give up your piano lessons——

GAYE : And when we get hungry, I can pawn my golf clubs, one by one.

LINDA : No !—they'll be the last to go.

[FLOGDELL *knocks on the door.*

GAYE : Yes ?

FLOGDELL (*entering*) : Mr. Reynolds to see you, sir.

[*For a second GAYE doesn't move. He turns to*
LINDA,

GAYE : Do you suppose he knows you're here

LINDA : He's my lover—and he's coming to ask you for my hand.

GAYE (*smiles back at her*) : Send him up, Flogdell

ILLOGDELL : Very well, sir. (*He goes.*)

GAYE : That boy hasn't been in this house since the day I engaged him. . . . He might wonder what you're doing here. Do you want to stay?

LINDA : You bet I want to stay. And I wish, when he comes in, you'd say, "This is my girl—and what the hell were you doing in her apartment?"

GAYE : My dear, when you're an old lady and I'm your handsome young sweetheart, on that day I'll flatter you by branding on your forehead "Private Property"—but right now—(*Quickly*) . . . Please—(*He holds the bedroom door open. LINDA hesitates a fraction of a second and then blowing him a hasty kiss, she goes out into bedroom. GAYE shuts the door behind her quickly. The next moment the other door opens and DICKIE REYNOLDS comes in Cordially but warily.*) Hello, Dickie.

DICKIE (*cheerfully*) : Hello, Mr. Gaye.

[*Pause.*]

GAYL : How are you?

DICKIE : Fine. How are you?

GAYL : Great.—Sit down.

DICKIE : Thanks.

[*Pause.*]

GAYL : Cigarette?

DICKIE : No, thank you. Bad for my tennis.

GAYE : Why don't you play golf, like me?

DICKIE : I do play golf.

GAYL : Oh, yes, I remember. You're one of those plus-two fellows, aren't you?

DICKIE (*with a grin*) : I've heard about you, too.

GAYE : Well, whatever you hear, they're afraid to say it to my face. . . . (*watching him, waiting*

to hear the purpose of his visit.) It's good to see you, Dickie.

DICKIE : It's good to see you. You don't get around to the theatre much, do you ?

GAYE : Well, I'm pretty busy these days.

DICKIE : A new play ?

GAYL : Hell, no.

DICKIE : It's about time, isn't it ? Don't you write one a year ?

GAYL : Oh, a fellow has to take a year off once in a while. I'm catching up on my education. Learning to ride a horse, taking piano lessons—

DICKIE (*grinning*) : I hear you're *good* on a horse

GAYE : Do *you* ride ?

DICKIE : Practically born in the saddle

GAYE : Do you play the piano ?

DICKIE : I had a band of my own at Yale.

GAYE : How are you on playwriting, you son-of-a-bitch ?

DICKIE : Not so good—and I'm afraid I'm not an actor, either. Mr. Gaye, I gave Benham my notice this morning. I thought I'd drop in and tell you so you wouldn't hear it from somebody else.

GAYE : What's the matter—don't you like to go on the road ? Chicago's not a bad town, you know.

DICKIE : I'm quitting the theatre

GAYE : Isn't that a rather sudden decision ?

DICKIE : Well, I had a chance to buy a ranch in Wyoming—my father left me a little money—so I bought it.

GAYE (*wryly*) : A ranch ? One of those places where you have to get up early in the morning ?

DICKIE : Five a.m. Then wheat cakes, sausage,

lamb chops, an omelet and apple pie for breakfast.

GAYE : You *have* to.

DICKIE : No. You *want* to.

GAYL : What do you do at night ?

DICKIE : You sleep.

GAYE (*nodding his head*) . Sure—you're crazy.

DICKIE (*rises*) : No—you're crazy. Everybody in the theatre is crazy. I don't like them. I like good, sincere, two-fisted, straight-from-the-shoulder men. If I hadn't been in a dramatic show at Yale and if not for the depression, I'd never have got into such an unhealthy atmosphere. Everybody stuck on himself, jealous of everybody else, fighting about his billing, belly-aching because another actor gets more lines. All the men are a lot of show-offs looking in the mirror all the time. And the women are worse.

GAYL : Tell me about the women, Dickie.

DICKIE : They're unwholesome. I like a woman who falls in love, marries, has kids and makes a home. Ain I right or not ?

GAYE : You're absolutely right.

DICKIE : Sure I'm right. Where would civilisation be if women didn't make homes ? How is the next generation going to be brought up ? Why, the women in the theatre, all they care about is getting emotional from eight-thirty to eleven every night, and then they've got nothing left to give to the generation of to-morrow.

GAYL : I didn't know you were interested in the generation of to-morrow.

DICKIE : I ain.

Pause.

GAYE (*rising*) : Well, Dickie—I'm sorry you're going to leave the show—but I'm glad you found yourself before you became a character actor.

DICKIE : So am I. You know, most of us don't find ourselves until it's too late.

[FLOGDELL *enters*.

FLOGDELL : Miss Linda Brown is downstairs, sir. Shall I show her up or shall I ask her to wait?

GAYE (*pause*) . Linda '—How nice ' . Ask her to come up, will you, Flogdell?

FLOGDELL : Yes, sir (FLOGDELL *goes*)

DICKIE : Well—guess I'll be going.

GAYE . Don't go. You and Linda are friends, aren't you?

DICKIE . Oh, sure.

GAYE (*impersonally*) . She's a great girl when you really get to know her.

DICKIE : She was your secretary once, wasn't she?

GAYE : Yes—and sometimes I wish I hadn't got her in the show. She's not a bad actress, but she was the best secretary I ever had. Intelligent, accurate, thorough—and that girl could take a hundred and fifty words per minute—(LINDA *enters Cordially*) Hello, Linda!

LINDA . Hello, Steven. My, you're looking well! Hello, Dickie.

DICKIE : Hello, Linda.

LINDA : I hope I'm not intruding.

GAYE : Not at all. . . . Is this a social visit, or is there something special you want to see me about?

LINDA : Well . . . (She *hesitates smiling*) . Neither.—I came to see Dickie.

DICKIE : (*Puzzled.*) See me? How did you know I was here?

LINDA : Why—uh—Flogdell told me.

GAYE : Did you hear the news about Dickie? He's leaving the show.

LINDA : Oh, really?

GAYE : Yes, isn't it too bad? He's bought a cow ranch.

LINDA (*cheerfully*) : Who are they going to get in his place? I hope they get Oscar Feroni, don't you?—I think he's romantic.

GAYE : You mean that bushy-haired fellow who sprawls picturesquely on floors?

LINDA : Uh-huh. I think he plays men awfully well . . .

DICKIE (*awkwardly*) : Well—so long.

GAYE : What's your hurry?

LINDA : Don't go on my account (*This is what we came in for—to clear the last vestige of suspicion from Steven's heart—and she isn't going to let DICKIE get away*). Oh, you must tell Mr. Gaye about all the fun you had yesterday afternoon in my apartment.

DICKIE (*staring at her*) : Yesterday afternoon? (*slowly*). Oh . . . So that's where I was!—Gee, Linda, that's terrible! I—I don't quite know what to say. You see, I never drink—and yesterday I bought the ranch and—and the real estate man and I had a couple of drinks—

GAYE : A couple?

DICKIE : Exactly two—that I can remember—Gee.—Did you have any trouble getting rid of me?

LINDA (*amiably*) : I don't know. I left you there. You might call on my maid and get the rest of the story.

DICKIE : Gosh.

[*The telephone rings, GAYE picks it up.*]

GAYE : Hello. . . . Yes. . . . All right. (*To DICKIE*) It's Benham. Did you give him your notice?

DICKIE : An hour ago.

GAYE : He's probably calling about you. (*Into the telephone*) Hello, Bill. . . . Yes—I know He's here right now. . . . (*hesitatingly*) Well I'll tell you—(*He gives DICKIE a quick look and hesitates again.*)

DICKIE : I'll run along.

GAYE (*To DICKIE*) . No, no, no. (*Into the telephone.*) Hold on a moment, will you, Bill ' (*He puts the telephone on the table and as he goes quickly toward the bedroom—to DICKIE.*) I may want to talk to you—I'll take it in the bedroom

LINDA (*rises*) : I think I'll go, Steven. I just dropped in about the publicity for Chicago I can see you another time.

GAYE : Please—I'll be right back. Entertain Dickie, like a nice girl.

[*GAYE goes into the bedroom. LINDA, for a moment functioning as a secretary, goes to the table picks up the telephone and listens ; when she is sure GAYE is connected, she hangs up the telephone.*]

DICKIE (*comes towards her*) : Listen. (*LINDA turns, startled at the sudden tension in DICKIE's voice.*)

LINDA : Yes?

DICKIE : How did you know I was here?

LINDA : I didn't. I made it up when I saw you DICKIE (*steps toward her. Desperately*) : Linda ! . .

LINDA (*a little frightened*) : What's the matter with you?

DICKIE (*violently*) : You.—I'm quitting the show on account of you. . . . Don't look at me like that. That's the way you've been looking at me for six months, as if I was the wallpaper

on the wall. It drove me crazy. *I remember yesterday.* I didn't buy a ranch. I had to see you. I couldn't stand it any longer. I took a couple of drinks—I don't know how many—so I could break through that look of yours.

LINDA : Dickie—you poor boy—you poor, foolish boy. What have I done to you ?

DICKIE (*breaking*) . Nothing. I love you so damn much I can't see straight— that's all (*She recoils from this as if struck. He stands trembling and looking at her, defiant and afraid. Then he turns away.*) —That's all .

[*Suddenly he turns and dashes out of the room. For a while LINDA does not move, but stands looking at the door through which DICKIE went. She is stirred, shaken to her toes. GAYL enters.*

GAYL : Where's Dickie ?

LINDA (*Pause. She is going to lie to him for the first time—a lie of omission*) He wanted to go, so—I didn't stop him

GAYL (*settling comfortably into the sofa*) . You didn't mean what you said about Oscar Feroni, did you ?

LINDA (*looks at him, then comes over to him slowly. In herself*) : Steven— will you marry me ?

GAYL (*tenderly*) . Will you stick to the subject ? What about Feroni ?

LINDA : Kiss me, Steven.

He kisses her lightly.

GAYL : You do love me, don't you ?

LINDA : I'd like to see anybody try to stop me.

GAYL : You make me very happy.

LINDA : Will you marry me ?

GAYL : I'm weakening.

LINDA : Oh, darling, darling——

GAYL : What are you crying about ?

LINDA : Let's do it right away.

GAYE (*moved*) : All right. (*They kiss.*) You know I've always wanted to, don't you ?

LINDA : Have you ?

GAYE : I only hesitated because I wasn't really sure you loved me——

LINDA : But now you are, aren't you ?

GAYE : Somehow, I am. . . . Let's go up to Greenwich to-morrow morning and get married.

LINDA : Done ! It's a date

[*There is a knock on the door.*

GAYE : Yes ?

[FLOGDELL *comes in.*

FLOGDELL : It's eleven-thirty. Time to practise your piano lesson, sir.

GAYE : Thank you, Flogdell.

FLOGDELL : Not at all, sir.

[FLOGDELL *goes. The atmosphere is easy and gay.*

GAYE (*with an air*) : Do you realise I have mastered one of Schubert's most uncomplicated Études ?

LINDA : Not really, Mr. Paderewski !

GAYE : I am in the mood. I shall play for you.

LINDA (*goes to the desk and gets her knitting from a drawer*) : This is a moment I will cherish.

GAYE (*now at the piano*) : Have you ever heard a great artist play the scales ?

LINDA : The scales—that's by Beethoven, isn't it ?

[*He begins to play the scales a little better than badly. LINDA takes ash tray, her knitting, and goes to the sofa.*

GAYE (*continues to play*) : I can play and address remarks to my concert audience at the same time.

LINDA (*stretched out on sofa, smoking, knitting*) :

A dual personality ! . . . Steven—you're really doing it nicely. I'm proud of you.

GAYE (*still playing*) : What do you make of Dickie, anyway ?

LINDA (*disturbed*) : He's a fool.

GAYE : Funny that he came to see you. (*Stops playing.*) Couldn't he remember why ?

LINDA (*frightened—her hands petrified at their knitting*) : Apparently not.

GAYE : Funny. . . .

LINDA (*desperately*) : I figured he stepped out of the Waldorf Bar, walked a block, looked up and saw where I live—— What do you think ?

GAYE : Well- it's hard to say. If it were in a play, I'd have a theory ; but in life—well, life never makes sense. (*He turns back to the piano and continues his scales.*) Happy ?

LINDA (*relaxing*) : Blissfully.

GAYE (*playing*) : You know—if I were writing a play, I'd have Dickie in love with you.

LINDA (*startled*) : Why ?

GAYE (*still playing*) : It's a better reason for leaving a show than a cow ranch—— Then I'd hint to the audience either that he's not really going away, or that you like him more than you're telling. . . . (*he continues to play*) But, thank the Lord, I'm a pianist, not a playwright. (*He continues cheerfully with his scales as*

THE CURTAIN SLOWLY FALLS

SCENE II

Same day. Six in the afternoon. The lamps are lit.

FLOGDELL is drawing the window curtains. He gives the flowers on the piano a finishing touch. The telephone rings.

FLOGDELL : Yes ? . . . Very well. . . . Good

evening, Miss Linda. . . . He's dressing, Miss Linda. . . . No, the place-cards haven't come yet, but they'll be here in time. . . . Just a moment, Miss Linda. (*He takes paper and a pencil from his pocket and makes notes as he talks.*) Yes, I've got it—you at Mr. Gayc's left—Mrs. Benham at Mr. Gayc's right. Then Mr. and Mrs. Galloway. . . . Yes. . . . Of course the caterer is *supposed* to be doing the job, but I have been around all the time, keeping an eye on things. After all, even the best caterer cannot provide that additional debonair touch which we of the theatre find so necessary. . . . Yes, Miss Linda. . . . Yes. . . . (*GAYE appears at the bedroom doorway. He is in evening dress except for a houserobe.*) Here's Mr. Gayc now.

[*GAYE takes the telephone. FLOGDELL goes.*]

GAYE : Hello, my darling. . . . Yes, my sweet. . . . No, my darling. . . . Yes, my love. . . . Yes, my dearest. . . . Can't you come right now ? . . . Of course I want you to look beautiful, but hurry. . . . It's six now. . . . Six-thirty ? Swell ! That'll give us an hour and a half before the guests come. Oh, say—does the bracelet go with the new dress ? . . . Well, it's another good sign. . . . At six-thirty then. . . . By the way, I didn't ask Dickie— Well, I wouldn't put it as strongly as that, but I'm glad you agree with me. . . . *Au revoir*, my darling, my dearest, my love. . . . What ? . . . No—Greenwich is the best place. We can motor out after breakfast and be married in time for lunch. . . . Good-bye, my own ! . . .

[*FLOGDELL comes in just as GAYE is finishing.*]

FLOGDELL : I beg your pardon, sir.

GAYE : I beg *your* pardon, Flogdell. (*He takes a flower from the vase on the piano.*)

FLOGDELL : For what, sir ?

GAYE : Does it matter, Flogdell ? I like you— I'm

your friend—and I beg your pardon. (*He puts the flower in FLOGDELL's buttonhole.*)

FLOGDELL : Thank you, sir.

GAYE : The important thing is—do you like *me*, are you *my* friend ?

FLOGDELL : May I answer that by a quotation, sir ?

GAYE . Please !

FLOGDELL :

“ When, to the sessions of sweet silent thought I summon up remembrance of things past——”

GAYE : Flogdell !—you love me !

FLOGDELL : Have you ever doubted it for a moment, sir ?

GAYE (*earnestly*) : Flogdell—I'm going to make an announcement at dinner to-night which will be the ultimate test of a gentleman's gentleman.

FLOGDELL : That can only mean one thing, sir.

GAYE (*seriously*) : I tremble for your answer.

FLOGDELL : You need not tremble, sir. . . . You see, I am—that is—I've become engaged to be married myself, sir.

GAYE : Why, Flogdell—how nice !

FLOGDELL : She's the housemaid across the street in Number Twenty-Three. It's our favourite joke, sir, that she works in Number Twenty-Three and she is twenty-three. If I may say so, sir, it's your play that did it.

[*They stand smiling at each other.*]

GAYE : Flogdell, do you dance ?

FLOGDELL : Yes, sir.

GAYE : Will you dance with me ?

FLOGDELL : Thank you, sir.

[*GAYE solemnly embraces FLOGDELL and, humming “ The Merry Widow Waltz,” they dance seven*

or eight steps. They are interrupted by the opening of the door. There stands DICKIE.

FLOGDELL (*to GAYE*) : I beg your pardon, sir !
(*Going hurriedly to the door.*) I had quite forgotten what I came in for. It was to tell you—that Mr. Reynolds is calling, sir.

GAYE : It was my fault, Flogdell.

FLOGDELL : Thank you, sir.

GAYE : Come in, Dickie.

[FLOGDELL goes. GAYE and DICKIE are alone.]

DICKIE : I—I happened to be passing—and—I thought I'd drop in to see you.

GAYE : Something special ?

DICKIE : I ran into Miss Darling to-day and she told me you're giving a dinner for the cast.

GAYE : Well, uh, in a way I am.

DICKIE : I haven't done anything to offend you, have I ?

GAYE : No, Dickie, of course not.

DICKIE : I always thought you liked me.

GAYE : I do like you—The only reason I didn't ask you was, after all, you're not in the cast any more. You resigned. And after the way you talked about people in the theatre, I didn't think you'd want to come.

DICKIE (*tensely*) : I do want to come—very much.

GAYE : That's too bad. I've invited ten people and that's all I can manage. I'm awfully sorry.

DICKIE : Linda's going to be there, isn't she ?

GAYE (*acutely attentive*) : Yes—why ?

DICKIE : I've got to see her.

GAYE (*coldly*) : You know where she lives.

DICKIE : I tried to see her all afternoon ; she wasn't at home to me.

GAYE : If it's about yesterday——

DICKIE : It is.

GAYE : Oh, you finally remembered !

DICKIE (*breaking*) : What do you mean, I finally remembered ?—I *told* her.

GAYE : You told her ! When ?

DICKIE : Right here—when you were telephoning—I told her what it was all about. She knows. Oh, God, Mr. Gaye, can't you see I'm in love with the girl ?

GAYE (*stricken*) : So that's why you quit the show !

DICKIE : Sure, that's why I quit. I couldn't stand it—her acting as if I wasn't on earth—me holding her in my arms every night, and her acting as if I wasn't on earth. . . . Every time I came near her—to tell her—I couldn't.

GAYE (*slowly*) : But this morning, you could.
. What did you tell her ?

DICKIE : What I'm telling you.

GAYE (*in pain*) : You're sure she understood what you were saying ?

DICKIE : She heard me, all right.

GAYE : . . . What did she say ?

DICKIE : I didn't wait to find out. I lost my nerve. I—I bolted.

GAYE : Why didn't you stay ? (*Savagely*) You damn fool, she'd have jumped into your arms.

DICKIE : Oh, gee—do you really think so !—No, you're wrong. What's the matter with me, Mr. Gaye ? You know me. You're a man of the world—you've lived—you're old enough to be my father. Tell me what's the matter with me.

GAYE (*bitterly*) : Nothing's the matter with you.

You've got everything. Youth—and everything.
. . . If you want her, go after her.

DICKIE : If it were any other girl—I never had trouble like this before—but she's different. You know her, Mr. Gaye. You've known her a long time. She thinks all the world of you—anyone can see that. She looks up to you. You've been in love yourself, haven't you ?

GAYE : Well—go on. What do you want ?

DICKIE : Understanding. I don't know whom to turn to. Let me come to-night. I'll shoot the works the first chance I get. I've got to have my break with her. I never really had it. Every man has a right to have one break, anyway, if he's in love with a woman. You're a man and I'm a man—and she doesn't mean anything to you— Or does she ?

GAYE (*slowly*) : Not a damn thing.

DICKIE : Then will you help me ?

GAYE : Help you ? Hell, I'll give her to you. You want your break—well, I'll hand it to you on a silver platter. She's due here at six-thirty—you know, ex-secretary helping with the place-cards. Well, I'll be gone, and she'll find you—(*turning away quickly and going to the bedroom door*)—The guests don't arrive until eight. That gives you an hour and a half. . . . You should be able to—get your message over in an hour and a half, don't you think ?

DICKIE : I—I'll try.

GAYE (*at the door*) : Well—the stage is yours.

[GAYE goes. DICKIE stands, somewhat dazed by the abruptness of GAYE's departure. He looks at his watch. Then he pulls himself together and begins to pace the room, impatient for and yet afraid of the moment when LINDA will come. The next moment

GAYE *re-enters through the centre door. He's in tails and top hat and carries his dress overcoat and stick.*

GAYE : If she wants to know what happened to me, tell her—tell her I got a great idea for a play and went down to the river to think it over. There's the bell. The butler'll get you anything you want—anything at all. (*He starts out.*)

DICKIE : Mr. Gaye—(*GAYE turns.*) How will I what'll I say to her ?

GAYE : What'll you say to her !

DICKIE : I—gosh, I don't know how to begin.

GAYE : This is marvellous ! . . . What do you expect me to do—write your love scene for you, too !

DICKIE : That's not what I mean. Naturally not. That would be ridiculous.

GAYE : Well, what *do* you mean ?

DICKIE : I don't know what I mean. I guess it's just that I wish I had your brains.

GAYE : My brains and your youth, eh ?

DICKIE : Well, a fellow can wish, can't he ? . . . Take the lines you wrote for me in the show. (*Half to himself*) Wouldn't it be wonderful if I—just for an hour—when I'm alone with her—You see, I've got the feelings and the thoughts, but I—I never seem to find the words.

GAYE : Well, Romeo, you're all out of luck. . . . Good-bye.

DICKIE (*resignedly*) : Okay, Mr. Gaye.

[GAYE *puts his hand on the door-knob and then turns, fascinated in spite of himself.*

GAYE : You've been in the show with her for six months, and three weeks of rehearsal. Didn't you ever talk to her ?

DICKIE Sure I did—at first, when she—before it happened. But afterwards—I couldn't find a tongue in my head.

GAYE (*comes into the room, hat on*) What did you say to her this morning?

DICKIE I don't remember

GAYE Well, for instance, did you say those classic words, "I love you?"

DICKIE I said, "I love you so damn much I can't see straight."

GAYE Not bad.

DICKIE (*eagerly*) Honestly?

GAYE What did she say?

DICKIE She said—

GAYE Never mind—don't tell me.

DICKIE Do you think, if I said the same thing to her—

GAYE No. That's only good the first time.

DICKIE I guess you're right.

[Pause]

GAYE This thing is getting me (*Slowly*) I could write that scene for you so that you couldn't miss—if in her heart she really cares a damn about you.

DICKIE Gee, Mr. Gaye—would you?

GAYE (*awed at himself. Scarcely aware of DICKIE*) Nothing like it has ever been done before—of course, there was Cyrano, but this is different.

. Let's see (*completely the artist now*) You're sitting here (*He indicates a chair with his walking stick*). The door opens. She comes in. At first she doesn't see you. What's the matter with me, am I going insane? The hell with you!

DICKIE . Mr. Gaye—if you've really got an idea

you *must* help me. I know writing is your profession—and if it's money, my father left me fifteen hundred shares of American Tel and Tel——

GAYE (*half to himself*) . Don't interrupt me. . . . I'd be the sap of the world to do it—and yet I can't walk out on it. . . . If Molnar were in a spot like this, he'd go through with it. . . . So would Sheridan . . . (*He stops short and turns to DICKIE, who is watching him in suspense. He puts his coat on a chair and his stick on the desk.*) Well, Dickie—you win. Let's shoot the works. We'll all of us shoot the works. . . . Now look——

DICKIE (*helpfully going to the chair GAYE had indicated*) : I'm sitting here

GAYE . Doesn't matter where you sit. She comes in. You tell her, as simply as you can, that you're leaving for Europe to-night on—take it—say the *Île de France*. Tell her you're all packed. (*Slowly*) You're going because of her. Whether she likes it or not, she has changed your whole life. She has made life more beautiful, more exciting, more painful. Be sure to get that in.

DICKIE (*repeats*) . More beautiful, more exciting, more painful.

GAYE . Right. There's nothing as dull as just "I love you." Now, this is a good-bye scene. That's what makes it strong. You're going away for ever. You're never going to see her again—you're never going to see this country again—all because of her. *She's* never going to see *you* again. . . .

DICKIE : Say, that's swell—she may even think I'm going to kill myself !

GAYE : No, no ! No suicide. No hint of suicide. That's unfair—to all parties concerned

DICKIE : Okay.

GAYE : Now. Carry that good-bye scene right to the door. She'll come to you. Start out of the door. Then turn. Ask her to kiss you good-bye. Think you can do that ?

DICKIE : I know I can.

GAYE : All right. . . . The rest is up to you.

DICKIE : . . . Suppose she won't kiss me ?

GAYE : She will. It's a good-bye scene. Any woman would. And after that it's up to the actors, not the playwright. The emotion is there, the moment has been created—and your bodies are there. . . . You shall find out all you need to know—we'll all find out.

DICKIE : Mr. Gaye. . . . Gee—you're brilliant.

GAYE : Maybe I am - (*slowly*)—and maybe I'm not.

[GAYE takes his coat and walks out. Now DICKIE is alone. He looks at his watch. He moves impatiently about the room. He pushes the bell. In a moment FLOGDELL enters.

FLOGDELL : Did you ring, sir ?

DICKIE : Yes. (*He looks at his watch again.*) I've got twenty after six. What time have you got ?

FLOGDELL : Nineteen and a half, sir.

DICKIE : Thank you.

FLOGDELL (*straightening an ash-tray*) : Did Mr. Gaye say where he was going, sir ?

DICKIE : No, he didn't.

FLOGDELL : Thank you, sir. . . . I understand you're not going to Chicago with the play, sir.

DICKIE : No, I'm not.

FLOGDELL (*fixing another ash-tray*) : If I may say so, it will be a great loss, sir. I agree with the phrasing of the critic in *Variety* who said . "The boy's got something."

DICKIE : Very nice of you—thank you.

FLOGDELL (*in the doorway*) : In fact, as I said to my future wife—what a Romeo Mr. Reynolds would make !

[DICKIE, staggered, stares as FLOGDELL goes. DICKIE moves about restlessly for a few moments and then sits down before the piano. Aimlessly, with one finger, he begins to play. LINDA comes bursting in.]

LINDA Steven ! (*She sees it is DICKIE.*) Oh.

DICKIE rises, confused—and overawed by the stunning effect of LINDA in her new evening dress.) Where's Mr. Gaye ?

DICKIE : He went out (*He takes a deep breath*)
He said—

LINDA : When'll he be back ?

DICKIE : Not for an hour and a half.

LINDA : What are you doing here ?

DICKIE : I—I came—

LINDA : You're not invited to the party to-night, are you ?

DICKIE : I—I don't know.

LINDA : Well, if you are, I won't come.

DICKIE : Linda, will you listen to me—

LINDA : No. I don't want to hear a word you have to say. I don't want to see you. I don't want to be in the same room with you. Either you go, or I go.

[*Pause.*]

DICKIE (*licked*) : I'll go. (*He moves slowly towards the door. Getting set*) But before I go, I want to tell you—

LINDA : And go as far away as you possibly can. Nothing would please me better than to know you were in China, or Europe or New Zealand—

DICKIE (*violently*) All right !

LINDA : Or anywhere where you couldn't pester me on the telephone.

DICKIE (*comes over to her swiftly*) : Shut up ! (*He grabs her roughly by the shoulders.*) Now listen to me !

[LINDA looks at him a little breathlessly. He realises he has nothing to say, and swept by the impetus of his own movement, he suddenly takes her in his arms and kisses her. LINDA fights him off. DICKIE relaxes his hold but doesn't let her go.]

LINDA (*trying to push him away and pounding at him—in a loud, frantic tone*) Let me go ! Let me go ! I tell you !

DICKIE . I love you

LINDA What's the matter with you—are you crazy ?

DICKIE (*still holding her*) . I love you.

LINDA . I hate you—oh, how I hate you !

DICKIE (*over her words*) . I love you, I love you, I love you, I love you, I love you, I love you, I—

[*He kisses her again. She tries violently to resist, but he holds her close. Gradually her resistance breaks down, and soon she is limp in his arms. After a while he releases her. They stand, shaken, looking at each other with new eyes. Then they go into each other's arms again, and now LINDA is kissing as well as being kissed. In the middle of this kiss, unseen by LINDA or DICKIE, the door opens and GAYE enters still wearing his hat and carrying his top-coat. He stands arrested by the sight of the embracing couple. The kiss lasts another few moments. Then LINDA draws slowly away from DICKIE. DICKIE sees GAYE first. LINDA follows DICKIE's look. She is paralysed at the sight of GAYE.*]

GAYE : Excuse me. (*He goes a few steps to the desk.*)
I came for my walking stick. (*He picks up the
stick, tucks it under his arm and moves to the door.*)
. . . You may not know it—but that was a
curtain line.

[*He goes. The two stand looking at the door through
which GAYE went.*]

CURTAIN

ACT III

The following October Evening.

The piano has disappeared, LINDA's photograph and lampshade are gone, and the room has the original bachelor's careless arrangement of furniture

We discover GAYE and GALLOWAY deeply studying a draughts-board. They are seated at a small table. GAYE is in a velvet smoking jacket. He looks older—this is accentuated by spectacles. FLOGDELL is mixing whiskey and soda. As the two sit in silence, FLOGDELL pours two drinks and sets one by each. Then he goes back quietly, sits down in the chair opposite GALLOWAY, and we realise by his behaviour that he is the one who is playing with GALLOWAY, GAYE being the onlooker.

FLOGDELL : Have you moved, sir ?

GALLOWAY (*indicating his move*) : Yes—I jumped you.

FLOGDELL : Well ! . . . I'm sorry, sir, but I shall have to jump you three—(*He does*) and that gives me another king.

GALLOWAY : Oh, my !—I didn't see that, did you, Steve ?

GAYE : My dear Frank, I saw it coming ten minutes ago.

GALLOWAY : Well, I haven't noticed *you* winning any games from Flogdell.

FLOGDELL : It is my observation that artists are never good draughts players, sir.

GAYE : Jump him, Frank—you've got to.

GALLOWAY : Where ? . . . (*In dismay*) Oh, oh ! (*In distress he makes the move and FLOGDELL thereupon cleans up the rest of GALLOWAY's men*).

GAYE : That's game.

FLOGDELL : Sorry, Mr Galloway

(GAYE Come on—give Flogdell his quarter

(GALLOWAY *(as he pays FLOGDELL his winnings)*
I don't mind losing, Steven, but you constantly
distract me with your asides

GAYE And what about your humming and
drumming with your knuckles—do you call
that draughts-manners ? I challenge you to a
game without sound effects

GALLOWAY No, thank you I've got to get
home *(He rises)* If I'm not home by ten-thirty,
Roberta worries

GAYE *(coaxingly)* One more drink It's lonely
here without you—isn't it, Flogdell ?

*[FLOGDELL, who is replenishing the glasses,
bows acquiescence*

GALLOWAY Very well Just soda for me No
Scotch

GAYE Have a night-cap with us, Flogdell

FLOGDELL *(raises his scarcely touched first drink)*
Thank you, sir *(He serves GALLOWAY)*

GAYE *usates FLOGDELL into a chair You the
three men are comfortably seated, glasses in hand*

FLOGDELL By the way, Mr Galloway, Mrs
Flogdell tried that recipe of Mrs Galloway's,
and I must report that for lightness delicacy of
flavour, and sheer melting deliciousness we
have never tasted such biscuits

GALLOWAY I'm charmed And how is the
little woman ?

FLOGDELL Doing very nicely, sir—very

GALLOWAY Don't forget to let us know when
the time comes, will you ?

FLOGDELL : You may count on me to advise you of the impending arrival of young Steven Galloway Flogdell.

GAYE : Here's to him.

[*They all drink.*]

GAYE (*to GALLOWAY*) : How are your Memoirs progressing, Frank ?

GALLOWAY : Splendidly. I'm just past my childhood. I had a particularly unhappy childhood.

GAYE : Who hasn't ?

FLOGDELL : If I may say so, sir, *my* childhood memories are among my sweetest ones.

GALLOWAY : There was one boy I couldn't lick, and it embittered my life up to the age of fifteen. The last I heard of him, he was driving a truck.

GAYE : There wasn't a boy in my street who couldn't lick me. . . .

FLOGDELL : . . . I was very handy with my fists as a youngster. I seriously considered a career in the professional ring.

GAYE and GALLOWAY (*leaning forward*) : Really !

FLOGDELL : I have always believed in the culture of the body as well as the mind. I'm into my sixties, but—(*he rises*)—if you will permit me, I can still touch the floor with my fists.

GAYE : Please, Flogdell !

[FLOGDELL *tries and doesn't quite make it.*]

FLOGDELL (*flustered*) : I do it every morning in my pyjamas ! If I may remove my coat, sir——

GAYE : Please !

[FLOGDELL *does, and this time he touches the floor successfully.*]

GAYE . Marvellous !

GALLOWAY (*patronisingly*) . Nice Uh—nice

GAYE . Can you do it ?

[GALLOWAY *stands up, takes off his coat, and without a word duplicates FLOGDELL's performance*

FLOGDELL I salute you, sir Pardon me, sir, but may I feel your muscles ?

GALLOWAY With pleasure (FLOGDELL *feels his bicep*) Go ahead—feel me all over

FLOGDELL *feels GALLOWAY's biceps, shoulders and thighs* You're a fine physical specimen, sir
You may, me—if you wish, sir

GALLOWAY Thank you (*He performs the same ritual with FLOGDELL (Admiringly)*) Hard as nails.

FLOGDELL Thank you, sir.

GALLOWAY Do you know anything about Indian wrestling ?

FLOGDELL (*puzzled*) Indian wrestling ?

GALLOWAY (*smugly*) I'll show you how it's done (*Demonstrating*) You put your foot here—stand like this—give me your hand—the point is to see which man can unbalance the other .

FLOGDELL (*leaning forward and unbalancing GALLOWAY*) You mean like this, sir ?

[GALLOWAY *lands sprawling on the floor, FLOGDELL still holding his hand*

GALLOWAY (*on the floor*) Yes, that's what I meant !

FLOGDELL (*helping him up*) : I beg your pardon,
it

[*Both, back to back, put on their coats.*

GAYE : Flogdell—

FLOGDELL (*the servant again*) : Yes, sir.

GAYF : Pour me another drink.

FLOGDELL : Very well, sir.

GALLOWAY (*collecting himself*) : And, ah, I'll have one, too.

FLOGDELL : Yes, sir.

GALLOWAY : With just a spot of Scotch in it.

FLOGDELL : Very well, sir.

[*As FLOGDELL prepares the drinks :*

GALLOWAY (*sitting*) . You know, I miss *Old Love*.

GAYF : I'm glad it's over.

GALLOWAY : That play affected my life. . . It did something to all of us. Linda marrying Dickie; Miss Darling getting a Hollywood contract . . . I thought either it would be a smash hit, like a Eugene O'Neill play, or a dreadful failure, like—like a Eugene O'Neill play. But who would have predicted that it would turn out just a show.

GAYE : You're depressing me.

GALLOWAY (*hastily*) : Oh, it was a splendid piece of work—but I do think your next should be a comedy.

GAYE : I haven't got a next. . . .

GALLOWAY : What's the matter with you, anyway, Steven?

GAYE : Nothing. I'm getting old, that's all.

GALLOWAY : Well, so am I.

GAYE : You *are* old.

GALLOWAY : You say it as if it were a crime, instead of a pleasure.

GAYE You like it, do you ?

[*Pause.*

GALLOWAY Steven, you ought to go out more—see people—why, you know half New York After all, at your age a man should begin to enjoy life—travel, see new countries—

GAYE I've been thinking about it, Frank . . . But every time I sit down with a map and a travel folder, I realise there's no trip as beautiful as Act One of a new play

[FLOGDELL, who has left the room some time during the above scene, now enters

FLOGDELL Miss Genevieve Lang calling, sir

GAYE (*surprised*) Genevieve Lang !

FLOGDELL She says she wishes to see you only for a moment, sir

GAYE All right show her up

[FLOGDELL has almost reached the door when he turns

FLOGDELL (*to GALLOWAY*) Pardon me, sir, I promised Mrs Galloway that you'd make your exit by ten-fifteen

GALLOWAY (*rising*) Oh, yes, yes, yes—thank you, Flogdell Good-bye, Steven (*He is about to follow FLOGDELL, then impulsively he turns and goes over to GAYE, puts his hand on GAYE's shoulder.*) Steven—think over what I said You're alone too much You ought to bring youth into your life I may say that I'm glad a young lady is visiting you, and furthermore I may say—

GAYE (*interrupting and patting his cheeks*) : He said that, not exit speech

GALLOWAY (*hurt, with dignity*) As I was saying, good night, Steven

GAYE : Good night, Frank.

[*They shake hands. GALLOWAY goes to the door, still retaining his dignity. FLOGDELL holds the door for him. As he reaches the door, he puts his arm around FLOGDELL's shoulder and the two go out together. GAYE stands quietly for a moment, then he goes to a small wall mirror, runs his hand through his hair to smooth it. He takes off his glasses and looks at himself. He decides not to wear his glasses. He picks up his spectacle-case from the table, is about to put the glasses away and then changes his mind, puts the glasses on again. The next moment GENEVIEVE enters. She is in evening clothes.*

GENEVIEVE : Steven !

GAYE : Genevieve !

GENEVIEVE : You must forgive my rushing in like this—but I was at the opera and in the first intermission I glanced at my programme and what do I see—the date : October ninth. I flew out, bought some flowers, jumped into a taxi, and here I am ! (*GAYE stares at her. She smiles back, enjoying his confusion. FLOGDELL enters, carrying a vase with red flowers.*) Thank you, Flogdell. Set them down—let me see—this desk would be nice.

[*FLOGDELL obeys and goes.*

GAYE (*puzzled*) : They're beautiful, Genevieve—thank you. But—

GENEVIEVE : But what ? (*Studying him with a smile.*) I suppose the ninth of October doesn't mean a thing to you.

GAYE : It was the day—ah—wasn't it the day when— (*He hesitates.*)

GENEVIEVE : It was—and it was the luckiest day of my life. Do you know what happened to me ?

GAYE : I've often wondered.

GENEVIEVE : I went to Finland !

GAYE : Did you !

GENEVIEVE : I did !—Steven, the Finns are the most wonderful people in the world. I brought one back with me. We just arrived last week. I've been on the verge of calling you a thousand times, but you know what a dither one gets into when one is buying a trousseau.—What a year, what a year ! Keep next Monday free—you're coming to my wedding.

GAYE : With pleasure, my dear child.

GENEVIEVE : And now—good-bye. Knut will wonder what's become of me, and he has a Finnish temper—pun.

GAYE (*accompanying her to the door*) : What's Knut like, young or rich ?

GENEVIEVE : Nobody's poor in Finland,—and he's exactly my age, but he doesn't know it.

GAYE : Genevieve, you haven't changed a bit.

GENEVIEVE : Oh yes, I have—completely. It's my favourite subject. Don't ask me how, or I'll spend the evening telling you.

GAYE : How ?

GENEVIEVE : I'm in love. Try it yourself some time.

GAYE : I have, thank you.

GENEVIEVE : You mean—love ?

GAYE (*spelling it*) : L-o-v-e.

GENEVIEVE. . . . You don't look very happy.

GAYE : I lost.

[She studies him a moment in silence, then she goes down to a chair and sits. As she lights a cigarette.]

GENEVIEVE : Knut can wait. It'll do him good. Tell me about it. . . . When did you meet her ?

GAYE : . . . October the ninth.

GENEVIEVE : Oh !—how interesting ! . . . Do I know her ?

GAYE (*wearily*) : What's the difference ?

[*Pause.*]

GENEVIEVE : How's the work ?

GAYE : There isn't any. . . .

GENEVIEVE : Now, Steven, love is the greatest thing on earth and all that—but don't be a baby.

GAYE : I'm not. I'm an old man.

[*Pause.*]

GENEVIEVE : Somehow I can't imagine you losing a girl if you really wanted to hold her.

GAYE (*savagely*) : I *gave* her away ! Why, he wouldn't have had a chance. But I saw something between them—he didn't know it was there—and I, *I* wrote his love scene, *I* staged it, *I* gave him the setting—I *put the words into his mouth*. . . . Well, I did a good job. And now they're happily married.

GENEVIEVE : Do you think that was very bright ?

GAYE : There's no fool like an old playwright. . . . Genevieve, Genevieve, I always thought when you got older, you got wiser. Well, it doesn't help. You know what it's all about, but don't let anybody tell you that lessens the pain.

GENEVIEVE : Steven, why don't you travel ? Look what it's done for me ! . . . See new places, new faces—get out in the open air—play golf.

GAYE (*patiently*) : Listen, Genevieve—I don't like golf.

GENEVIEVE : I'll tell you what—join us at the opera, and then we'll all go somewhere.

GAYE : I don't like opera.

GENEVIEVE : Well—there's only one thing left for you to do.

GAYE : I don't like suicide !

[*Suddenly they both look up. The door has swept open and there is LINDA, carrying a huge bouquet of yellow flowers. She is wearing a sports coat over a dinner gown. She stops short at the sight of GENEVIEVE. GAYE has risen. Pause.*]

LINDA : Hello !

GAYE (*after getting his breath*) : Good evening. (*Pause.*) Do you ladies know each other ? Miss Lang, Miss Brown—I mean Mrs. Reynolds.

GENEVIEVE : How do you do.

LINDA : How do you do. (*Pause.*) I suppose you don't know what day to-day is.

GAYE (*maliciously*) : Tuesday ?

LINDA : It's October the ninth.

GAYE : So it is.

LINDA : I brought you some flowers.

GAYE : So I see.

GENEVIEVE (*being nice*) : Aren't they lovely !

LINDA (*looking around*) : Where can I put them ?
GAYE goes to the bell.) Never mind. (*Going to the case containing GENEVIEVE's flowers.*) We can throw these out. They don't look so good. (*She puts her flowers on the table, takes GENEVIEVE's flowers from the case and puts them into the wastebasket. Then, while GAYE and GENEVIEVE exchange dazed glances,*

she puts her own flowers into the vase.) I think yellow goes better in this room. There ! (She looks defiantly at the other two. Pause.)

GENEVIEVE : Well ! . . . *(She goes over to the wastebasket containing her flowers, which happen to have fallen right ends up. She picks up the wastebasket as if it were a vase and marches to the still open door.)*
Good-bye ! *(She goes. There is a moment's silence.)*

LINDA : Were those her flowers ?

GAYE : They were, but the wastebasket is mine.

LINDA : What is she to you ?

GAYE : Say—how did you get in here, anyway—and what do you want ?

LINDA : You've got to answer my question, Steven—what is she to you ?

GAYE : A friend.

LINDA : What do you mean, a friend ?

GAYE : A girl I never was in love with.

[Pause.]

LINDA : Steven, will you take me back ?

GAYE : Is that how little you know me ?

LINDA *(taking off her coat)* : You've got to take me back. You don't know what I've been through. I've been in hell for five months. No matter what I've done to you, I've paid for it. I lead a life of torture—it's become a nightmare—you're the only one who can save me.

GAYE : Don't you love him any more ?

LINDA : I can't stand him !

GAYE : You loved him—when you married him . . . didn't you ?

LINDA : I thought I did. It all happened so quickly, how could I tell ? I married him that same night—I left the show—you were so impossible about the whole thing, I hated you. . . . I could have loved him ; I wanted to ; I tried—And then came the honeymoon. . . . I never want to go through anything like it again. Oh, Steven, why didn't you tell me what a dreadful thing youth was—why didn't anybody tell me ?—We went to Palm Beach. Here's a typical honeymoon day : out of bed at seven—A.M. not P.M.—three hasty kisses, a shower, then we play tennis—what do I know about tennis ? Then, swacating and limp, another shower, two hasty kisses, and swimming, while I sit on the beach and burn. Did you ever see the rich men's sons in their bathing suits waiting for the depression to pass ? They're broad-shouldered, handsome, tan—every one of them was once an All-American something—and ten feet away you can't tell one from the other . . . and you couldn't tell Dickie from any of them. Then he get's a rub down and it's time for lunch. Oh, Steven, after sitting with a clean-cut outdoor man and watching him eat vitamins, starches and spinach, you and your pills are a Midsummer Night's Dream. Going to bed with him was just like going to bed with the front page of a physical culture magazine : in the first place, I was too exhausted by that time to care for him even if I hadn't begun to hate him ; and there you lie, unable to sleep because the lights are on—and why are the lights on ? Because Lionel Strongfort has to do his setting-up exercises : it seems that somewhere during the day he missed out on a couple of muscles. Then a home in Connecticut, fox-hunting, golf, polo. . . . Five months of it, Steven—five months without night life, without the theatre, without glasses of beer pounding the table because somebody

has got something crazy and beautiful and passionate to say to somebody else, without cigarettes and poetry and laughter and bad ventilation, without dialogue—without you, Steven. . . .

GAYE : Where's Dickie ?

LINDA : He's at the Waldorf.

GAYE : Does he know you're here ?

LINDA : No.

GAYE : Where does he think you are ?

LINDA : I don't know. I left him a note telling him good-bye and that I wanted a divorce.

GAYE : Does he still love you ?

LINDA : What do you think ?

GAYE : I think he does—and I think you should go back to him. . . .

LINDA : Don't you care for me any more ?

GAYE : No.

LINDA : I love you more than ever. I know I've hurt you, Steven, frightfully—but I'll make it up to you. It's October the ninth—our anniversary—I had to come back to you. It's been a wonderful and terrible year for both of us. We're ready for each other now.

GAYE (*slowly*) : I would like it very much if I never saw you any more, or heard from you—or anything.

[There is silence while she looks at him and realises fully what he has been through.]

LINDA : Steven, I'm never going to make the mistake of leaving you again.

[There is a pause. Then GAYE gets up and goes to the telephone. He dials it.]

GAYE (*into the telephone*) : Waldorf-Astoria ? . . .
Mr. Richard Reynolds, please.

LINDA : What are you going to do ?

GAYE : I'm going to have your husband come
and get you. (LINDA *thinks this over for a second,*
then lights a cigarette and settles back in her chair.
Into the telephone) Are you sure he doesn't ?

. . . Will you ring him again, please. (*There is*
a knock at the door.) Come in. (FLOGDELL *enters,*
somewhat agitated.) What is it, Flogdell ?

FLOGDELL : It's Mr. Reynolds, sir

[GAYE *hangs up the telephone.*

GAYE : Send him up.

FLOGDELL : I beg your pardon, sir—but he's
not precisely in the apartment (*Looking for*
a moment at LINDA and then back to GAYE) He
has two other gentlemen with him, sir—and a
detective. He seems to be in quite a state, and I
thought it best not to admit him until I had
consulted with you.

GAYE : Does he know Miss Linda is here ?

FLOGDELL : I took it upon myself to say she
was not here, sir—but the detective con-
tradicted me through the aperture.

[GAYE *looks at LINDA. She is sitting erect and*
looking back at him a little breathlessly, but she
doesn't say a word. GAYE turns to FLOGDELL.

GAYE : Let them come up.

FLOGDELL : Including the detective, sir ?

GAYE : No—you may exclude the detective,
Flogdell.

FLOGDELL : Very well, sir.

[*He goes. GAYE stands for a moment in thought.*
LINDA hasn't moved, nor has she once taken her eyes
off him. Now GAYE goes to the bedroom door and
holds it open.

GAYE : Get in there. (*She hesitates an instant, then takes her coat and goes in. He goes to the door and makes sure it is shut. Then he goes quickly to the bookshelves, takes a book, and sits down. The next moment FLOGDELL opens the door, and DICKIE enters, followed by two young men who are cut from the same pattern as DICKIE—tanned, broad-shouldered, well-tailored college men. GAYE rises with a very cordial smile. FLOGDELL stays.*) Why, hello, Dickie ! How are you ? It's about time you came to see me ! Where's Linda ?

DICKIE : (*ignoring GAYE's outstretched hand. Grimly*) You know damn well where she is.

GAYE (*looking bewildered*) : Do I ?

DICKIE : She's right here, in this apartment.

GAYE : Linda ?

DICKIE : Yes, Linda.

GAYE : Flogdell, has Mrs. Reynolds been here this evening ?

FLOGDELL : No, sir.

DICKIE : Be careful what you say. You're in the presence of witnesses.

GAYE (*annoyed*) : Look here—I don't recall inviting you or these splendid physical specimens to my apartment.

FLOGDELL : Pardon me, sir, but if you have changed your mind about seeing these gentlemen, it would be a pleasure to show them out, sir.

FIRST FRIEND (*aggressively*) : You and who else ?

FLOGDELL : Just I, sir.

GAYE : Thank you very much, Flogdell—but I'm afraid you might lose your temper. You may go.

FLOGDELL : Very well, sir. (*He goes.*)

DICKIE : Now, fellows, before we search the house, look around—and remember everything you see. (*He holds GAYE's eye challengingly as :*

FIRST FRIEND : Two high-balls, one empty.

SECOND FRIEND : Three cigarettes, no lip rouge marks——

FIRST FRIEND : One draughts-board——

SECOND FRIEND (*picking it up*) : One hairpin.

DICKIE (*starting for the bedroom door*) : All right—let's go.

GAYE (*steps in front of him*) : Before you make another move, I wish to call your attention to the fact that you're in the United States of America, not Yale.

[*Pause.*

DICKIE : One hour ago Linda slipped out of the hotel. She left this note.

[*He hands GAYE the note. GAYE reads it.*

GAYE (*with an air of astonishment*) : My goodness gracious !

DICKIE (*takes back the note*) : You were the first one I suspected.

GAYE : *Me ?*

DICKIE : Yes, you. For five months : heard, morning, noon and night, is Gaye. Like a fool, I was broadminded, my glasses, dumb enough to believe there's a in the lousy world of the theatre. id. There are better now.

GAYE : Just what is it that you. to LINDA, from

DICKIE (*with deliberation*) : My two of them to the bouquet of flowers, walked around. What happened five times—and then she entered here, sir ?

Well, if you two think you can ma

me, you're mistaken. I live in a respectable community, I've got a position to maintain—and if anybody gets the divorce, I get it.

GAYE Dickie, will you be good enough to dismiss the glee club, and sit down, and tell me what this is all about?

DICKIE And if she thinks she's going to get any alimony, she's got another—

[DICKIE stops cold, for the bedroom door opens and LINDA, very cool and casual, but frightened and unhappy underneath, strolls in. She has taken off her dress and her shoes. Over her slip she wears an old bathrobe of GAYE'S and on her feet she wears a pair of GAYE'S bedroom slippers.]

LINDA (as she enters) Steven—where are the cigarettes? Oh, hello, Dickie. And Butch!

FIRST FRIEND (offended) I'm not Butch.

LINDA (amiably) I'm sorry. I always get you boys mixed. You're Chuck, aren't you—and he's Butch.

DICKIE Just what I expected to find! *Fellow, I want you to remember every word that's being said in this room.*

[The three young men stand like military guards. Pray.]

FLOGDELL (to LINDA) Uh—won't you sit down? changed men, it working up the bathrobe skirt with sixteenth-century and going to the sofa) With

FIRST FRIEND (FLOGDELL Just nted a cigarette, didn't you?

GAYE Thank but I'm afraid one with an elaborately g¹¹trian! You may go

FLOGDELL It?

LINDA : Thank you.

[GAYE lights one for himself and lounges gracefully on the sofa, ignoring the three young men, who remain standing.]

GAYE : Have you read any good books lately ?

LINDA : Well—yes and no.

GAYE : Lovely weather we're having.

LINDA (*covily*) : I wouldn't put it past you.

[Pause.]

GAYE (*indicating his old bathrobe she is wearing*) : What a beautiful garment ! I've been admiring it all evening.

LINDA : Yes, it's a little model by Patou. Patou took one look at me and he said : " Girlie, I got just the thing for you ! "

[FLOGDELL, without knocking, enters. He has this upon himself—just to be sure his master is safe.]

FLOGDELL : Did you ring, sir ?

GAYE (*who hasn't been near the bell*) : Why—er—us, Flogdell !

LINDA : Where's the champagne ?

FLOGDELL : The champagne ?

GAYE : The champagne !

FLOGDELL : Oh, yes, sir. How many glasses, sir ?

GAYE : Flogdell, don't be stupid. There are only two of us.

FLOGDELL (*looking from GAYE to LINDA, from LINDA to GAYE and then from the two of them to the three silent young men. To GAYE*) : What happened to the three gentlemen who were here, sir ?

[Pause.]

DICKIE : All right, fellows. (*Flanked by the two young men, he marches over to GAYE and LINDA. Like a lawyer*) Do you fellows know this woman ?

FRIENDS : We do.

DICKIE : Is she or is she not my wife ?

FRIENDS : She is.

DICKIE : Please observe in detail the nature of her attire.

[*LINDA shrinks a little at this and draws the hitherto open bathrobe closely about her.*]

FRIENDS : Okay. Right.

DICKIE : We'll see who's going to get the divorce. (*He starts for the door. Turning to GAYE*) And you—— Thought you were smart, didn't you ! Deliberately giving me a love lesson—teaching me how to win her—passing your ex-mistress off on me ! Well, your lesson wasn't so hot. She was so glad to get a husband, she just fell into my arms and I didn't have to say a word except I love you.

[*He walks out, followed by the other two. LINDA and GAYE sit stricken. The crudeness of DICKIE's attack has stripped them of all gaiety. FLOGDELL hesitates a moment after the three have passed through the door, and then, seeing he is not wanted, he follows them, shutting the door carefully behind him. LINDA and GAYE sit speechless for a moment, and then LINDA suddenly begins to weep. GAYE stands looking after the departed ones.*]

LINDA (*quietly*) : Steven.

[*He turns.*]

GAYE : Yes—— ?

LINDA : When I came in, I thought I wanted you—and I thought you would *have* to want me if I wanted you. I thought to myself, as I was

walking around and around and around the block : In another five years he'll be almost sixty and interested in bigger things than love, and I'll be thirty which nowadays is very young, and then we'll really be through with each other, and by that time somebody else will probably fall in love with me whom I'll be able to endure, because although I'm not a Garbo people do seem to be falling in love with me recently—there were two up in Connecticut— You see, Steven, I've become quite mature and realistic, don't you think, and not the romantic gul who once thought life was a flame just because you lived and breathed, and to tell the truth I even thought so when I was walking around the block—but you must agree I'm being sensible now.

GAYE (*absently*) . You are, Linda. Very sensible.

LINDA : And I *have* changed, haven't I ?

GAYE : Yes—you have.

LINDA : And knowing you as well as I do—well, after all, you've had your affairs, you've been married even, and I'm sure in each case you thought this is the one great love, this is the mountain top, this is the glory that will never end, just as you did with me. . . . Didn't you ?

GAYE *doesn't answer ; he hasn't heard her ; he is on, busy with his own thoughts. She waits a pitiful moment and then bravely goes over to him and continues.*) So the way I sum it up is that you can't warm up cold mutton, not unless you're a weakling, and you yourself once said there's nothing uglier than ex-lovers being friends. . . . So I'm going to say good-bye, Steven. (*She holds out her hand.*)

GAYE : Good-bye, Linda. (*He takes her hand. He is about to drop it, and then, something still on his mind, thoughtfully*) Listen. . . . Is that all he said—just "I love you" ?

LINDA (*wide-eyed*) : Yes, Steven. . . .

[GAYE drops her hand slowly—walks over to the sofa and sinks down.

GAYE : Well ! . . . No matter what I do—it seems I can't escape from comedy ! . . . (*A moment, and then suddenly an idea begins to grow. His face lights up—the old excitement is returning. LINDA stands watching him fascinated. Slowly*) I think I've got the most exquisitely lyrical damned idea anybody ever had since Time began ! (*Quickly and on tiptoe LINDA walks across to the desk, takes out notebook and pencil, comes back and sits down. GAYE gives her a swift, absent-minded look. He rises, excited, and moves across the room. Over his shoulder*) Ready ?

LINDA (*pencil poised, a smile beginning to break*) Ready.

GAYE (*dictating with great excitement*) : Act one . . . Scene one. . . . A pent-house apartment in New York City. Change that ! (*He comes over and sits on the arm of her chair. He glances at her abstractly.*) The bedroom . . . of a castle in Spain. . . .

[*As he talks, and as LINDA writes,*

THE CURTAIN FALLS

CLOSE QUARTERS

CLOSE QUARTERS

A Play
in Three Acts

Adapted by
GILBERT LENNON

From the play "Attentat" by
W O SOMIN

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*All applications for permission to perform this play should be
made to Mr. Erich Glass, 41 West End Lane, London, N.W. 6.*

CHARACTERS

LIESA BERGMANN

GUSTAV BERGMANN

SCENES

ACT I

SCENE: The kitchen-living-room of the Bergmanns' flat in a working-class tenement in a continental capital.

TIME: About eight-thirty p.m. on an evening in early November.

ACT II

SCENE: The parlour of the Bergmanns' new flat in a modern block of workers' dwellings.

TIME: The following evening.

ACT III

SCENE: The same as Act II.

TIME: Early the following morning.

The play was performed for the first time at
the Embassy Theatre, June 25th, 1935, with the
following cast

Liesa Bergmann

FLORA ROBSON

Gustav Bergmann

OSCAR HOMOLKA

Produced by IRENE HENISCHIL

ACT I

SCENE · *The kitchen-living-room of the BERGMANNS' flat in a working-class tenement in a continental capital*

TIME *About eight-thirty p.m. on an evening in early November*

It is a mean room, with dingy wallpaper and cheap furniture. Right is a tiled cooking-stove on which is a kettle. At the back is a door into the bedroom. Left another door leads out of the flat to the landing and stairs. Centre is a table on which is a check-pattern tablecloth. On a sideboard are a wireless set and a clock. Down left is a sofa.

When the curtain rises the room is in darkness, except for a gleam from the landing which shines through the sunlight above the door, left.

After a few moments, hurried footsteps are heard. Then a key is turned in the door, left, and a woman comes in. She switches on the light and shuts the door.

LIESA BERGMANN, who is about thirty, was once pretty, but her looks are fast fading. She is a woman of some character, but to-morrow she seems nervous and frightened. Her clothes, although neat, are obviously cheap. Below her coat, which is unbuttoned, can be seen a dark-coloured dress. She is carrying a small handbag.

For a second or two LIESA stands with her back against the door, breathing hard, as if she has been running. Then she comes centre, and puts her handbag on the chair in front of the table, and glances at the clock.

LIESA : My God ! Half past eight !

[She runs into the bedroom, beginning to take off her coat on the way. The hurried opening and shutting of drawers is heard, and then LIESA comes in again. She is in her underclothes, and carries a lighter-coloured dress over her arm. Throwing the dress on to

a chair, she stokes up the stove and puts the kettle on the ring. Then she quickly gets into the dress, but, without waiting to do it up, hurriedly lays the table for supper. She keeps glancing at the clock, and, when the table is laid, she gives a sigh of relief.

Well, that's that. (*Looks at clock.*) I wonder why he's so late ?

[*LIESA does up her dress, sits down, and picks up a newspaper, but she is much too agitated to read it, and, throwing it aside, she gets up again and walks nervously about the room. At the door, left, she stops and listens, but hears nothing. She comes back to the table, and slightly changes the position of the plates and straightens the knives. Then, going to a small mirror on the wall, she tidies her hair. Suddenly GUSTAV can be heard singing cheerfully as he mounts the stairs, and a key is put in the lock of the door, left.*

(*Calling, as she hurries to the door*) : Gustav, is that you ?

GUSTAV (*coming in and closing the door*) : Yes, it's me. Were you expecting anyone else, my dear ?

[*GUSTAV BERGMANN, who is about thirty-five, is an honest idealist and something of a fanatic, and wears a red tie. He is not quite sober.*

LIESA (*embracing him*) : Oh, Gustav !

GUSTAV (*drawing back*) : Eh ! . . . Here—what's up ? (*Throws down his hat, and, taking off his overcoat, hangs it on the back of the door.*)

LIESA (*confusedly*) : Gustav, dear, it was so terrible—(*stops short, and then goes on quickly*) so terrible—waiting—you're so late, I mean.

GUSTAV : Well—I can't help being a bit late sometimes. We'd a lot to do to-night. (*With much gravity*) Very important business ! ! (*Laughs and kisses her.*)

LIESA : Gustav ! Have you been drinking ?

GUSTAV : I had a glass of beer at the meeting. Have you any objection ?

LIESA : Was that all ?

GUSTAV : Well—perhaps it was two—small ones.
(*Sits on sofa, and, taking off his boots, puts on slippers.*)

LIESA (*forcing herself to appear calm*) : You see, when you didn't come, I got frightened. I thought something might have happened to you.

GUSTAV : Something happen to me ? What ?
(*Laughs.*) What could happen to me ?

LIESA : Well, I—I don't know, but—you were late, and I just got nervous. Terrible things seem to happen nowadays. Robberies and—no one seems safe.

GUSTAV : Go on ! You've been reading the Sunday papers, my lass. And, anyhow, I'm not the sort of bloke who gets robbed. They usually choose someone worth robbing.

LIESA : Yes, but—it's very dark outside, isn't it ?

GUSTAV (*holding up his ringless fingers*) : Yes. Not even enough light to make my diamond rings sparkle. No, Liesa, I don't think there's much fear of my being robbed.

LIESA : Yes—I suppose it was stupid of me.
(*Takes cups and saucers from shelf up right, and wipes them over.*) How did the meeting go ?

GUSTAV : Oh—quietly. Very quietly—considering.

LIESA : Considering what ?

GUSTAV : Well—considering the situation, everything is very quiet—on the surface, at any rate. Nothing doing.

LIESA (*meaningly*) : Nothing ?

GUSTAV : No. The revolution won't take place till after breakfast ! (*Laughs.*)

LIESA : Gustav, don't be silly.

GUSTAV : Well, were you expecting a bust-up ?
Something exciting ?

LIESA : I ? No, of course not. (*Brings cups and saucers over to table.*) Did you come straight from the meeting ?

GUSTAV (*hesitates and looks at LIESA*) : Yes.

LIESA (*sits at table*) : It was late in finishing, then ?

GUSTAV (*sitting up*) : Here, what are you getting at ? Do you think I've been doing a pub-crawl on my way home ?

LIESA : I only thought that perhaps you—

GUSTAV (*rising and going to her*) : Look here, Liesa, why treat me as if I were a kid ? I know you think I'm only a poor ignorant foreigner, but—

LIESA (*interrupting*) : I don't.

GUSTAV : Well, then—I can look after myself—see ? (*Shrugs his shoulders, and smiles good-naturedly.*) But I suppose you can't help it. That's how you were brought up—eh ? You ought to have married a respectable haberdasher, like your pa was.

LIESA : Gustav—please !

GUSTAV : Oh, I'm not pretending I was much of a catch. "A nasty, common foreigner, who couldn't even speak properly." Isn't that what they said ?

LIESA : Didn't I run off with you ?

GUSTAV (*patting her shoulder*) : You certainly did, and I must say you've got courage. Or at least you used to have. Do you remember how we left your poor father wringing his hands behind the counter ? (*Chuckles.*) I can see him yet. And your Aunt Minnie, weeping because of the awful disgrace, and wiping her eyes on a pair of

gent's cotton underpants, because she had lost her hanky. (*Laughs loudly.*)

LILSA. Have I changed so very much since those days?

GUSTAV: You've become a bit of a frightened mouse since then, haven't you? Always full of little qualms and fears. (*Sits at table, beside her.*)

LILSA (*meaningly*): Always?

GUSTAV (*gently*): Nearly always. Nerves, I expect. Women do get like that. (*Pause.*) So you want some news, eh? Well, well! I have some news for you.

LILSA (*startled*): Not bad news?

GUSTAV: There you go again. Why should it be bad news?

LILSA: But tell me— what is it?

GUSTAV (*rising and going to sideboard*): We're going to have a little celebration to-night.

LILSA: A celebration?

GUSTAV: Yes. And not in a pub. (*Taking a bottle of beer out of the cupboard*) We are going to have it here.

LILSA: Why? I don't understand.

GUSTAV: Because to-night something happened.

LILSA: What?

GUSTAV (*bringing the bottle and two glasses to the table*): I had a great success at the meeting. Our comrades are going to honour me. Yes, *me*.

LILSA: Oh! I'm so glad.

GUSTAV (*opening the bottle and pouring out the beer*): I knew you would be. Yes. You ought to be proud of your Gustav.

LILSA (*quietly*): Don't you think you've had enough beer?

GUSTAV : One can never have *enough* beer. And we must drink to my success.

LIESA : All right, then—but what is it ?

GUSTAV . Don't be in such a damned hurry. Let me tell it my own way. (*Raising his glass*) Here's to you and me, Liesa !

[GUSTAV almost drains his glass, and LIESA takes a sip from her glass.

(*Sits at the table*) You know I was going to make a speech to-night ?

LIESA . Yes

GUSTAV Well, Liesa, believe me, it was the one speech of the evening that counted. Every word went over. This is what I said ' Comrades, we must stand firm ! We, the workers, the real creators, have got to stand together, shoulder to shoulder. It's little enough they'll give us, and we've got to take all we can get. Now is our chance ! The election is looming ahead, and if we give in now we are lost. Lost ! Wages must go up, not down. We are not slaves to be dictated to. And, if need be, we've got our answer—a strike. A real strike, with no damned nonsense about it. And we've got to hold out—even if it means starvation ! ' ' (*Gulps down some beer, and turns to LIESA*) That and a whole lot more , and, by gosh, Liesa, it carried them with me !

LIESA : Then it's to be a strike ? (*Rises, and, going to the stove, makes coffee*)

GUSTAV Yes, if they drive us to it. Of course there were some whimpering curs who wouldn't agree at first. Damned cowards ! Terrified of losing the few coins they've got hidden away in a dirty sock. (*Loudly*) I told them to get out and stay out. We've got to be firm and united. Solidarity—that's our watchword. And we've got to fight for the sake of those who come after us

The right is on our side, and I'd rather die
starving in a ditch than beg for mercy

LILSA And yet, I suppose, there are two sides
to every question

GUSTAV What do you mean? Not this question.

LILSA. Perhaps not, darling, and yet—you
wonder that I am sometimes frightened for you

GUSTAV Don't worry about me

LILSA How can I help it? You're such a
hothead.

GUSTAV. Nonsense, I'm no hothead. I was nice
and reasonable and gentle—I really was. I was
almost polite to them (*Loudly*) "You dirty
swabs," I said "You'd stab us in the back,
would you?" And I banged my fist on the
table till all the glasses rattled. (*Laughs, and then
quietly*) And then, naturally, they saw my point
and I agreed at once

LILSA (*anxiously*) . If you're not careful, you'll
lose your job.

GUSTAV. Why should I? (*Rises*)

LILSA. Do you suppose the bosses don't know
what goes on? They probably know more about
it than you think.

GUSTAV (*going beside her*) Oh, stop it, you little
hulk I'm not frightened. No need to be now.
(*Slowly*) Because after the meeting— (*He
steps, and clears his throat.*)

LILSA (*tensely*) . After the meeting? What?

GUSTAV Well, after the meeting, Heimberger
you know, the deputy—came up and con-
gratulated me (*Slowly*) Then—he offered me a
job in the party—as an official—a paid job.

LILSA: Well—and then what happened?

GUSTAV: And then what happened? What
more do you want?

LIESA : Then you came home ?

GUSTAV (*turns away*) : Yes—then I came home
(*Pause.*) Aren't you pleased ? Why, it's almost
too good to be true ! When Heimberger asked
if I'd accept, I said, " Yes," quick as I could.
What do you think of it, my dear ? The foreigner
who couldn't even speak properly. A bit of a
change now—eh ? And all my own doing, too.

LIESA : One day you'll finish up in gaol.

GUSTAV : And I thought you'd be delighted
Well I'm hanged ! (*Sits above table.*)

LIESA : You may be, if you go on like this. Or
someone will knife you, or——

GUSTAV : Or I'll be shot—eh ?

LIESA (*starts*) : Yes—shot.

GUSTAV : That's certainly more likely. Go on
with you, Liesa, you're a regular wet blanket
to-night. Don't be chicken-hearted. But, don't
you see, this is going to mean a lot to us. I'm to
work for the party now, and not for some
damned capitalist. And it means more money.
The wages haven't been settled yet, but it'll be
better than I'm getting now. Surely that pleases
you ?

LIESA (*not very enthusiastically*) : Yes—yes, of
course, that pleases me, dear. (*Brings coffee, and
sits right of table.*)

GUSTAV : Why, it may be the start of all sorts
of things ; and, to begin with, we are going into
a better flat.

LIESA (*surprised*) : What ?

GUSTAV : Yes. This pigsty isn't fit for anyone to
live in. Not for us now, anyhow. And it's all
arranged.

LIESA : How do you mean, it's all arranged ?

GUSTAV : Listen ! Heimberger asked me where
I lived, and then wanted to know if we had a

telephone. When I told him we hadn't, he said we ought to move, and that he knew the very place for us. Two rooms and a kitchen, a shower-bath, and a telephone. It's in that new block they've just put up.

LISA. But—but how can we move? We've got to get rid of this first.

GUSTAV: That's all settled. Pilski got married yesterday, and he and his girl are living in an attic over a stable. (*Laughs.*) He nearly hugged me when this flat was suggested to him.

LISA *with sudden interest*: Then—oh, Gustav—why shouldn't we move to-morrow?

GUSTAV: To-morrow? You're in an almighty hurry!

LISA (*urgently*): Gustav, I must get out of here.

Rises. This narrow hole is driving me mad. I feel I can't stand it any longer. (*Goes across left.*)

GUSTAV (*rises and follows her*): Well, I'm damned! You women are the limit. Give you a little and you want the lot. You've liked this flat well enough so far. What's wrong with it all of a sudden?

LISA: But you've just said yourself that it isn't fit for us to live in—now.

GUSTAV: Did I? (*Looks round room.*) So we've got to clear out to-morrow, have we? Oh, well—have it your own way. (*Sits on sofa, and pulls her on to his knee.*)

LISA: Do you mind very much, dear?

GUSTAV (*patting her shoulder*): Why should I mind, if it makes you happy? You know, old girl, I'm pretty fond of you—with all your faults! (*Laughs.*)

LISA: All my faults? (*Pulls his hair.*)

GUSTAV (*laughing*): Here—stop! All mine, I mean. (*Loosens her hands, and rises and goes to the*

table.) I say, if you don't want your beer, I'll have it. (*Drinks her beer.*) Remember, I gave the pubs a miss to-night and came straight home to you—and nearly broke my bloody neck doing it, too. (*Goes up to the door, left, and, taking a cigar from his overcoat pocket, throws the coat on the back of the sofa.*)

LIESA (*on sofa*) Nearly broke your—neck?

GUSTAV Well, I might have done. It was nearly pitch dark in the wood.

LIESA (*suddenly agitated*) You came through the wood?

GUSTAV Yes, I took the short cut.

LIESA But, Gustav, the wood! It's—it's not safe at night.

GUSTAV (*going across right*) Safe! What are you afraid of? If it was one of the real forests in my country—miles and miles of it—then you might talk. But this—it's only a few trees. (*Lights his cigar.*)

LIESA (*slowly*) You—came—through the wood—

GUSTAV Isn't that what I'm telling you? Yes. I came straight through the wood, by the old cart-road—passed our dear friend Sanders's house. (*Sits, down right.*)

LIESA (*gasps in horror*) Oh!

GUSTAV Well, haven't I a right to walk past his house if I want to? He may be a damned scoundrel, a blood-sucking capitalist, and a Minister of State, but he'd hardly jump out from behind a hedge and shoot me. (*Looking at LIESA.*) What's wrong? Why are you staring at me like that?

LIESA: It's—it's only I —

GUSTAV (*rises and crosses to her*) Go on with you! If that man saw me, he'd run a mile. He

knows I can shoot straighter and quicker than he can. And that was one of the things I told them at the meeting to-night.

LIESA (*horrified*) : You told them that ?

GUSTAV (*laughing*) : It was only a joke. You know I wouldn't hurt a fly, far less shoot a human being— (*suddenly serious*)—unless I was *attacked* of course.

LIESA (*quietly*) : Even if you'd been attacked, you wouldn't have been able to shoot anyone to-night.

GUSTAV : Why not ? (*Puts his hand to his hip-pocket, and then laughs.*) No, that's true. Where did I leave my shooting-iron this morning ? Did you find it ?

LIESA (*hesitating*) : I—yes—I put it in the drawer in the sideboard.

GUSTAV (*turns to table, and finishes the beer*) : And I left my gloves here, too ; it was damned cold without them. (*Chuckles*) I seem to be getting forgetful in my old age. And talking of that, I'm nearly forgetting to tell you my third bit of news.

LIESA : And what's that ?

GUSTAV (*sits left of table, and pulls chair round to face her*) : We're going abroad—soon, perhaps.

LIESA (*unbelievingly*) : Have you arranged to draw the first prize in a sweep ?

GUSTAV : No, I'm serious. I'm probably being sent abroad for a few months, to—what was it ?—to study local conditions and broaden my outlook—(*smirks*)—if that's possible.

LIESA : Where to ?

GUSTAV : I don't know yet. England perhaps.

LIESA (*dreamily*) : That would be wonderful !

GUSTAV (*pleased*) : Good for you, Liesa. I thought perhaps you mightn't like the idea.

LIESA (*with sudden energy*) : Like it ! I'd like to go to-day—this very night. (*Rises.*)

GUSTAV : That's the spirit. You're the wife for me, Liesa.

LIESA (*kneeling in front of him, and taking his hand*) Gustav, I'll go anywhere, if it's to help you And, my dear, you're going to get on, 'I'm sure you are Perhaps one day they'll make you a deputy Just think then we'll have a position and be wealthy. (*Proudly*) I've always said you'd go far, if only you got your chance And this may be it. (*In a different tone*) I do hope we'll be able to start soon.

GUSTAV (*laughing*) You impatient little hussy ! First you can't leave the flat quick enough, and now you can't get out of the country fast enough (*Rises*) Here ! What about some music to cheer you up ? (*He goes across to the wireless*) And we've got to celebrate. I know I'm feeling quite cheerful—why shouldn't I be, eh ?

[LIESA rises, and sits right of table.

GUSTAV switches on the wireless, and it blares dance music. He turns it down a little, and then picks up a newspaper.

LIESA : Where is it from ?

GUSTAV : Just a moment (*Pause*) The Grand Hotel. There we are, you see. The honest poor can listen with the idle rich to the Grand Hotel Orchestra. I've only got to tuck a napkin in my collar, and drink my beer out of a wine-glass, to feel like a bloated plutocrat

LIESA (*trying to be light-hearted*) : I don't feel much like a plutocrat in this. (*Looks down at her frock*) I'd have to dress up a bit

GUSTAV (*sits end of sofa*) : Undress a bit, you mean !

LIESA (*laughs, and then thinks for a moment*) Gustav ! Let's pretend. Let's do something

exciting ! (*Rises and goes across to him.*) Shall I put on my red dress ? Do let me, please. And my new silk stockings, and—and the shoes you gave me for my birthday—and—and—— (*Her train trails off.*)

GUSTAV (*gazing at her*) : I say, what has come over you to-night ?

LIESA (*looking away*) : I happen to love you—rather specially to-night.

GUSTAV : Is that true ?

LIESA . Yes, quite true.

GUSTAV : Liesa—you seem to be miles away from me somehow !

LIESA : But I'm here, standing in front of you. (*Looks at him.*) That's real enough, isn't it ?

GUSTAV : Yes, darling, but——

LIESA (*kneels beside him*) : I'm just the same Liesa who loves you and takes care of you.

GUSTAV : I don't mean that exactly. You are the same, and yet different. I don't know how, but you seem to have changed in some way. (*Looks at her.*) What is the difference ? Liesa—tell me.

LIESA (*she puts her hands on his*) : Gustav, your hands are shaking.

GUSTAV (*drawing his hands away and looking at them*) : Are they ? I expect it's just that I'm a bit excited. (*Puts his hands in his pockets.*)

LIESA : Well, then, who's being strange to-night ? You're suspicious just because I want to make myself pretty for you.

GUSTAV : I only said——

LIESA (*interrupting*) : Am I as old as all that ? Have we been married so very long ? (*Rises, and turns away, right.*)

GUSTAV : But, Liesa, dear, it was only a joke. Come on, put on your best things. I'd like you to—(*seriously*)—provided you don't expect me to dress up.

LIESA : No, I don't want to, now. I've got a lot of work to do. (*Sighs.*) I'll get on with my sewing. (*Picks up her work-bag.*)

GUSTAV (*teasing her*) : Mind you don't forget to put my name on everything. Most important !

LIESA (*sitting, down right, and beginning to sew*) . Why do you always tease me about that ? It is important.

GUSTAV : Yes. Even more important than mending the holes ! (*Laughs, and lies back on the sofa*)

LIESA : You needn't laugh. Anyhow, it saves me a lot of trouble when I go through the laundry. There can't be any argument. Besides, if you leave a thing somewhere by mistake, and your name's on it, it's much more likely to be traced.

GUSTAV : Advice to young girls : Never wear your marked undies on your evening out !

LIESA : Now, now !

GUSTAV (*sitting up*) : Sorry. I keep forgetting we are so respectable. . . . Never mind, my dear. You're quite right. Go on with the good work. Sew on your names—dozens of them ; and meanwhile I will dance to you. (*Rises*)

LIESA (*smiling*) : Don't be silly.

GUSTAV : Silly ! Far from it. You will represent the commodious residence of Mr. and Mrs. Bergmann, and I—(*makes an exaggerated bow*)—the Grand Hotel !

[LIESA laughs.

Now, a button-hole.

[GUSTAV puts a teaspoon in his button-hole, and then puts his hat at an angle on the back of his head

LIESA : Gentlemen don't usually wear hats when they dance at the Grand Hotel.

GUSTAV : How do you know ? Have you ever been there ?

[LIESA looks away

Anyhow, they're being worn to-night.

[GUSTAV takes his handkerchief in his left hand, and picking up a cushion, addresses it.

Midnight ! May I have the pleasure ? Thank you. What's that ? . . . The orchestra a little louder ? Certainly .

[GUSTAV turns the wireless on louder, and then, holding the cushion as if it were his partner, begins to waltz in a grotesque, dignified manner.

How charming you are looking, Countess . . . I hear you are going to be divorced again. . . . If at any time I can be of any service ? . . .

[LIESA watches him for a moment or two. Then she bursts out laughing, claps her hands, and, jumping up, takes the place of the cushion. They dance gaily until the music suddenly fades out

(Looking at the instrument) Damn !

[Announcer's VOICE is heard. GUSTAV and LIESA stand listening near the wireless

VOICE This is a special announcement being broadcast from all transmitters. We are sorry to interrupt the programmes, but some serious news has just been received. The police report that, this evening, the Minister for the Interior, Doctor Fritz Sander, was found dead in the woods near his house. Doctor Sander had been shot at close quarters. No weapon was discovered, but an examination of the bullet indicates that it was probably fired from a 6.3 mm. Mauser pistol. It was at first thought that the crime might be a political one, but, as the victim's watch, note-case, and rings are missing,

it is now presumed that robbery was the motive. We are asked by the Chief of Police to announce that any person giving information which may lead to the arrest of the murderer will be handsomely rewarded. In view of the tragic event, and as a mark of respect to the late Doctor Sander, all transmitters will now close down. . . . Good night, ladies and gentlemen. Good night.

[GUSTAV and LIESA, who have remained rooted to the spot during the announcement, look at each other in horror.

GUSTAV : My God ! (*He switches off the wireless*

LIESA (*excitedly*) : Oh, it's horrible !—horrible ! That's why I was frightened when you told me that—(*stops and hesitates*)—that you had come through the wood.

GUSTAV (*surprised*) : But—how did you know ?

[LIESA turns away, and tries to hide her confusion by putting the cushion back into place. GUSTAV scratches his head, and then chuckles.

Oh, I see. You thought they might have shot me instead of him.

LIESA (*relieved*) : Yes. I— Well, it's so dark in the wood. You said it was. They might have mistaken you for him.

GUSTAV : Hardly. Sander was small—and the shot was fired from close up.

LIESA : How can they tell that ?

GUSTAV : I don't know. Perhaps his coat was singed by the flash.

LIESA : But he was shot in the head.

GUSTAV : Eh ? (*Looks at her.*) I didn't hear that, only that it was at close quarters.

LIESA (*confused*) : Well—then—I—I must have

heard it wrong. (*Sits left of table.*) I thought he said in the head. Anyhow, what does it matter? I know you didn't like Sander, but it's murder.

(*With sudden energy*) It's beastly. And I only hope, if they catch the man who did it, that they'll execute him. He ought to be beaten to death.

GUSTAV (*angrily*) Are you saying that to me?

LISA Yes. Why? (*Suddenly looks at him, and starts*) Gustav! What do you mean?

GUSTAV You know very well what I mean.

LISA (*frightened*) I don't. Gustav! You mean—
—you?

GUSTAV I mean that you know how I hate and loathe capital punishment. For years—ever since I came to this country—I've fought against it. How dare you speak to me like that?

LISA (*quietly, with relief*) Oh—yes—I'm sorry.

GUSTAV (*solemnly, and with great conviction as he walks slowly about the room*) Life is holy. Perhaps it's the only holy thing there is. It is certainly the one thing the living have a real right to call their own, and no court in the world should be able to take it away. Only the individual himself has any rights over his own life. If a man is a murderer, is that any reason for murdering him? An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, a life for a life. These stuck-up, God-fearing, pious people may judge like that, but the judge who pronounces the death sentence ought to carry out the execution himself. Then capital punishment would disappear quick enough. And so would wars, if the people who started them had to fight in the front rank.

LISA (*quietly*) : Would you rather be imprisoned for life?

[GUSTAV, who is up right, does not answer.

(*Indicating*) Personally, I'd rather die.

GUSTAV : There's a big difference between killing yourself and being killed. (*Comes down.*)

LIESA : Then—if you—— ? You would commit suicide ?

GUSTAV : Yes—definitely. (*Pause, as he sits right of table.*) But let's get off that subject. Surely the question isn't exactly topical.

LIESA (*slowly*) : I hope not.

GUSTAV (*startled*) : You hope not ? Why do you say that ?

LIESA : You spoke against Sander at the meeting.

GUSTAV : And why not ? I've done it before a hundred times—and—— (*Stops short.*) Yes (*Half laughs.*)

LIESA : What ?

GUSTAV (*slowly*) : To-night, I said something about—shooting down mad dogs. Funny, wasn't it ?

LIESA : Oh, God ! How could you say that ? To-night of all nights !

GUSTAV (*thinking*) : I suppose it was rather stupid. (*Pause, then quickly*) Look here ! You'd better keep your mouth shut about my being in the wood.

LIESA : Did anyone see you ?

GUSTAV : I didn't see anyone.

LIESA (*quietly*) : No one ? Are you quite sure ?

GUSTAV (*looking at her quickly*) : Of course I am. What are you getting at ?

LIESA (*nervously*) : Nothing.

GUSTAV (*jumping up as he thinks he grasps her meaning*) : But—Liesa ! (*Horried*) Oh, my God ! Do you really think that I—I killed him ?

LIESA : It's not what I think. It's what others may think. After what you said to-night, if you were seen in the wood, before any ordinary court you'd be half guilty when the trial began.

GUSTAV (*as if beginning to realise the possibilities of the situation*) . Good Lord ! You're quite right. I was a damned fool to say that ! (*Turns away*) And supposing I was seen ? (*Glances at LIESA, and then goes on quickly*) Perhaps by the man who shot Sander ? (*Going across left*) He'd only have to denounce me, to shift suspicion from himself ! (*Pause*) Liesa ! What am I to do ?

LIESA : I've always told you not to go through the wood.

GUSTAV : Why cast that up ? You might at least try to help (*Turns, and paces nervously about*) Can't or won't, I suppose. When a man's in real trouble, the woman lets him down. (*Sits at end of sofa*)

LIESA : That's unjust. All I said is—that it always worried me and now —

GUSTAV . And now, you've something real to worry about. (*Pause*) Yes—and my pistol is a 6 } Mauser

LIESA : But you didn't have it.

GUSTAV : No, I didn't—but—

[*Steps are heard off left, on the landing outside.*]

LIESA (*jumping up*) : Ssh ! Here's someone.

GUSTAV : Eh ?

[*They listen tensely. For a moment or two a shadow appears on the wall of the landing, which can be seen through the fanlight above the door left. Then the steps die away. GUSTAV and LIESA relax.*]

LIESA (*sinking into her chair again*) : Oh—this is ghastly ! And it might go on for days. Every step on the stairs !

GUSTAV (*quietly*) : We've got to find something to—to prove me innocent.

LIESA : If you are innocent, then you can't be condemned (*Slowly*) And you are—aren't you

GUSTAV : You think there is no such thing as a judicial murder, but there is. Five years after you're executed, they express their regret. What's the good of innocence if you can't prove it?

LIESA : Isn't it just possible that they may catch the—the real murderer?

GUSTAV (*looking at her*) : Him?

LIESA : Yes (*Quickly*) Come, my dear. It's no good getting in a state (*Rises and goes to sideboard*) I'll make you a nice sandwich, and then we'll go to bed.

GUSTAV : But what am I to do? Supposing they come for me now?

LIESA (*taking bread, butter, and liver sausage from the cupboard, and bringing them to the table*) The police don't move as quickly as all that. Let's just wait. Perhaps to-morrow things will look different. Do let me cut you a sandwich!

GUSTAV : I don't want to eat.

LIESA : My dear man, you're behaving as if you really had done the murder and the police were on your track. Hold your head up and face it. Don't be such a coward.

GUSTAV : It's not that (*very slowly*)—but to have a human life on one's conscience.

LIESA (*in horror*) : Gustav!

GUSTAV : Well, it's true.

LIESA : What?

GUSTAV : Sander was always in the way, and I felt he laughed at me. I've often wanted to kill him. Of course I didn't really mean to—

but I couldn't help thinking about it. And now——

LIRSA Go on !

GUSTAV : Well—can't you see ? Morally—it's almost the same as having done it. And if others think you have— and—you can't prove you haven't——

LIRSA What nonsense ! They've got to prove that you're guilty, not that you're innocent

GUSTAV : Oh, I know that. But even if I did get off through lack of evidence, what would it look like ? And the courts don't forget to emphasise that the rope of guilt didn't just meet round your neck. It leaves its mark all right.

LIRSA Free is free.

GUSTAV : Only as long as it suits the police. You know what would happen. Constant watching and spying and waiting to catch you out. (*Rises and crosses right*) Ugh ! I'd rather be found guilty. Besides, do you think if they once got me, the foreign agitator, they'd let me go again ?

LIRSA No, perhaps not

GUSTAV And what about my fight against capital punishment ? A suspected murderer who has just managed to escape the gallows ! Nobody believes a man if they think he's talking in his own interests— unless they think it's in their interest, too. It's always the same

LIRSA Gustav, do be sensible. (*Sits on sofa*) Why make everything out so black ?

GUSTAV Well— isn't it black ? (*Comes over near her*)

LIRSA . Listen ! Your friends know when you left the meeting, and I can swear you were here by a certain time. That'll prove that you came straight home. Also, I can witness that you hadn't your pistol with you.

GUSTAV : That's no good ; you're my wife
Besides, it only takes the fraction of a second to
shoot a man, and Mauser pistols can be bought
easily enough. (*Pulling himself together*) No ! I've
got to think this thing out. (*Glances at wireless*)
What were the actual words ? (*Sits on sofa, beside
her.*)

LIESA : " Doctor Sander was found dead in the
wood near his house "

GUSTAV . Yes ; what else ?

LIESA . " He had been shot at close quarters,"
and—and he'd been robbed Don't forget that

GUSTAV Yes—and I'm not a thief. (*Slowly*)
And surely if I'd shot him at close quarters, and
then gone through his pockets, wouldn't I have
got in a mess ?

LIESA : Why ?

GUSTAV (*rises*) : Well—blood. Almost bound to
get blood on my clothes (*Glances down at his
clothes and turns to show her.*) Look ! Nothing there
It mayn't prove much, but at least it's some-
thing.

LIESA : There you are. What did I say ? And
after a good night's sleep you'll probably think
of a lot of other things (*Rises.*) And now you're
going to eat a sandwich for my sake.

GUSTAV : Just for your sake. Come on, then.

LIESA (*going to table*) : That's a dear. Now, on
moment. (*She cuts two slices of bread.*) I am going
to make it with the liver sausage you're so fond
of. I bought it specially.

[*LIESA slices the sausage, and the knife slips and
cuts her finger.*]

Oh !

GUSTAV : Cut your finger ?

LIESA : It's only a scratch.

[LISA *sucks her finger, and reaches for her handbag.*

GUSTAV : I'll get it.

[GUSTAV *picks up the handbag, takes out a handkerchief, and then notices that the handkerchief has blood on it.*

Hallo, what's this ? Have you cut yourself once before to-day ?

LISA . No. Why ?

GUSTAV (*looking at handkerchief*) : There's a lot of blood on this.

LISA (*confusedly, and snatching the handkerchief from him*) : Oh—I— Yes, of course—my nose was bleeding. (*Drops the handkerchief on a chair.*)

GUSTAV . Why didn't you tell me ?

LISA . It was nothing

GUSTAV . Funny ! I've never known your nose bleed before. (*Gives her his own handkerchief.*) Here, take this.

LISA : Thanks.

GUSTAV : You're all right, are you ? Feeling quite well ?

LISA . Perfectly. Don't be absurd. Really, there's no need to make a fuss about a little thing like my nose bleeding. It came on quite suddenly. I got some spots of blood on my dress, too

[GUSTAV *looks at her dress.*

No, not this one. I had to change it.

GUSTAV (*thoughtfully*) . Have you been out to-day ?

LISA (*quickly*) No—I—that is—I just had to run out to buy a few things. Why ?

GUSTAV : Nothing. Only—if you're not feeling well, you shouldn't go out. I could have got anything for you.

LIESA : Would you tie this, please ?

[GUSTAV *ties the handkerchief round LIESA's finger.*

Thank you, darling. (*Gives him a kiss*)

[*Suddenly they both hear footsteps on the stairs
They turn and listen.*

GUSTAV (*in a whisper*) Who's that ?

LIESA (*in a whisper*) Wait !

[*A shadow appears as before, and the steps stop in front of their door, and there is a knock. LIESA takes a step towards the door.*

GUSTAV (*catching her arm*) Don't move. Keep quiet

[*The knock is repeated.*

Hush !

VOICE (*from off, left*) Mr Bergmann ! Mr Bergmann !

[*Another knock.*

Why don't you answer ?

[GUSTAV *points up at the light, and then at the fanlight* LIESA *puts her finger to her lips, and tiptoes to the bedroom door and opens it noiselessly*

LIESA (*calling, as if from bedroom*) : Hallo ! Is anyone there ?

VOICE Yes. Why don't you open the door ?

LIESA . Can't I'm not dressed.

VOICE . Oh, all right It's a telegram. I'll leave it outside.

LIESA : Thank you.

VOICE Good night.

LIESA : Good night

[GUSTAV and LIESA *wait, in silence, till the footsteps die away.*

What can it be ?

GUSTAV : I'll get it.

[GUSTAV crosses, and, opening door, brings in the telegram.

LILSA (*nervously*) : What is it ?

GUSTAV (*tearing open the envelope*) : How can I tell yet ? (*Reads telegram.*)

LILSA : Yes ?

GUSTAV (*laughs, and reads out*) : " Everything all right. Heimberger."

LILSA : What does that mean ?

GUSTAV (*proudly*) : It means that the party committee has confirmed my appointment.

LILSA (*relieved*) : Oh, I'm so glad. (*Embracing him*) Well done. Gustav ! Now we've no more worries.

GUSTAV (*smiling*) : " No more worries " is hoping a bit too much.

LILSA : But we can move to-morrow.

GUSTAV : Look here, what is the hurry ? Won't the day after to-morrow do ?

LILSA : No, no. Let's get out of here as quick as we can. I can't stay any longer. I'd like to move to-night, if we could.

GUSTAV : All right, all right. If you want to move to-morrow, we'll move to-morrow ; though I can't see what all the excitement is about. Anyhow, Pilski will be glad. . . . Where's that sandwich you promised me ?

LILSA (*putting sausage between pieces of bread*) : And then you'll go to bed, won't you ?

GUSTAV : I'll go now, and eat it in bed. Then we can switch this damned light off. (*Goes to side-board, and opens cupboard as if looking for something.*) That fellow saw it through the fanlight. That's how he knew we were in. (*Coming back to table,*

and taking sandwich) Thanks. (*Licks his lips.*) I'm still thirsty.

LIESA : Have some coffee ?

GUSTAV : No, thanks.

LIESA : Off you go, then. I'll tidy up.

GUSTAV : Oh, leave it till the morning. (*Takes her arm.*) Come to bed. I'm tired.

LIESA (*turning back to table*) : I must just tidy up a little.

[GUSTAV goes into the bedroom. LIESA begins to clear the table. Then she sees GUSTAV's overcoat on the back of the sofa. Picking it up, she is about to fold it, when she notices that one of the front buttons is loose. She holds up the coat, and is examining the other buttons when GUSTAV appears again in the doorway. In one hand he still has the telegram, and in the other the remains of the sandwich. He stands watching her.

GUSTAV : Satisfied—eh ?

LIESA (*starts, and drops the coat guiltily*) : There—there's a button loose.

GUSTAV : Oh ! (*Glances round the room, and then pointing to the blood-stained handkerchief on the chair*) I shouldn't leave that about in here.

[GUSTAV goes back into the bedroom, leaving the door open. LIESA switches off the light, picks up the handkerchief, looks at it in disgust, crumples it into a ball, throws it into the stove, and goes slowly into the bedroom as the

CURTAIN DESCENDS

ACT II

SCENE *The parlour of the BERGMANNS' new flat in a modern block of workers' dwellings.*

TIME : *The following evening.*

The room is scantily furnished most of the furniture having been brought from the old flat, and there are signs that the unpacking is not yet finished, for piles of dishes are on the sideboard, pictures are stacked in the corners, and an open packing-case is down right centre. Up right and up left are doors leading into the kitchen and bedroom respectively. At the back, a door, in which is a letter-box, opens on to the landing and stair, and near it is a tall table, on which is the wireless set. Left is the sideboard, and right, a window, the sofa and a writing-desk, with a telephone and the clock on it. The dining-table, in the centre, is laid for supper.

When the curtain rises, GUSTAV is sitting at the desk, opening some letters. After a few moments, LILSA comes in from the kitchen, carrying a pile of plates.

LILSA : Has the post come ? *(Puts plates on the sideboard.)*

GUSTAV : H-m-m.

LILSA : Nothing for me ?

GUSTAV : No.

LILSA *(looking round the room)* : Oh, it is so lovely !

GUSTAV : What ?

LILSA *(crossing to him)* : Our new flat. It's beautiful. I can't help just running from room to room and admiring it.

[GUSTAV laughs.]

LILSA : I feel I could bear things here.

GUSTAV *(looking round)* : That's about the fifth time you've said that to-day. What is this terrible thing you've got to bear ?

IP

[LIESA does not answer.

And, anyway, what was wrong with the old place? I know it was a bit small, but it wasn't so bad, and—we were happy enough.

LIESA (*kneeling at packing-case and taking out books*): I can't explain quite.

GUSTAV (*laughs*): Is the ghost of Fritz Sander haunting you?

LIESA (*startled*): Why do you say things like that?

GUSTAV: Why shouldn't I?

LIESA: It's such utter nonsense.

GUSTAV: Well, why shouldn't I talk nonsense if I want to? This isn't a public meeting.

LIESA: I'm sorry I suppose it's just that I'm tired.

GUSTAV: And no wonder. I'm glad we don't have to move every day.

LIESA: Yes. (*Rises, and carries books over to side-board.*) And that awful murder, and all its possible consequences—

GUSTAV: What consequences? There's no real evidence against me. Not even a spot of blood (*Laughs.*) The only blood was on your things (*Glances round*)

[GUSTAV laughs, then stops short as he notices LIESA's horrified look.

Good God, woman! What's the matter?

LIESA: Nothing. (*Turns away.*) Nothing is the matter with me. I—I must see if supper is ready.

[LIESA goes off into kitchen.

GUSTAV shrugs his shoulders, and opens the last of his letters. He glances through it, and then sits up and reads it nervously, as if it contains bad news. He looks at the signature, and then starts to read at the beginning again.

GUSTAV (*calling*) : Liesa ! Liesa !

[LIESA comes in, and stands on his left.]

LIESA : What is it ?

GUSTAV : A letter from Heimberger. Listen !
(*Reads*) "The rumour is that the police now believe the crime to be a political one—in fact, an assassination."

LIESA (*quietly*) : Assassination ! But what about the things that were stolen ?

[GUSTAV shrugs his shoulders.]

Do they—do they suspect anyone ?

GUSTAV (*looking at letter*) : Heimberger thinks that someone is under suspicion. A member of the opposition—but apparently not one of our party.

LIESA : Not our party ? Then—that's all right.
(*Loudly*) What does it matter to us ?

GUSTAV : You women are the limit, Liesa. Yesterday you were all for catching the murderer and executing him ; and now you're not even interested.

LIESA : Why should I be ? If he's not one of our people—let them execute him. I don't care.

GUSTAV (*heatedly*) : Stop talking like that. An execution is nothing but legalised murder.

LIESA : It probably saves a lot of trouble—sometimes.

GUSTAV : Will you be quiet ! You know my feelings about this.

LIESA : I certainly ought to, but remember they haven't caught him yet. (*Turns away, and, putting up a picture, tries how it will look in various places on the wall.*) By the way, Mother Mertens looked in this afternoon. She is getting deaf—can hardly hear a thing. Isn't it funny the way deaf people always shout at you ?

[*Pause. GUSTAV sits staring in front of him.*]

Are you listening ?

GUSTAV : What's that ? Oh, yes—Mother Mettens. Yes, she's very deaf.

LIESA : I gave her a bundle of old clothes to take home with her.

GUSTAV : You might have sold them and got something.

LIESA : They weren't worth selling, and she was awfully pleased.

[*GUSTAV looks at the letter again.*]

She sat talking for nearly half an hour, admiring our new flat, and praising you up for getting on so well. It's a wonder your ears didn't tingle.

[*Pause. GUSTAV lays letter on desk.*]

GUSTAV : I don't quite like the tone of this letter.

LIESA : Why not ?

GUSTAV (*slowly*) : When I came home last night—why didn't you tell me at once that your nose had been bleeding ?

LIESA : I—I don't know. I suppose I didn't want to worry you. Besides, it was such a trifle. (*Pause.*) What made you think of that ? (*Puts down the picture.*)

GUSTAV : In the old days you used to tell me everything.

LIESA : Did I ? (*Lightly*) What a nuisance I must have been, when you came home tired. (*Shuts the lid of the packing-case.*) No wonder you were grumpy sometimes.

GUSTAV : I wasn't, and I liked it. (*Rising.*) I want to hear everything—always.

LIESA : Even the little unimportant things ?

GUSTAV : It's often just the little unimportant things that count.

LIESA : Yes, but I don't want to bother you.

GUSTAV : It bothers me much more when you hide things from me.

LIESA : Hide things ?

GUSTAV : Yes.

LIESA : I don't understand.

GUSTAV : Don't you ? Aren't you hiding something now ? (*Standing beside her, right centre.*)

LIESA : Oh, Gustav—I didn't want to let you see how worried I am, but I can't help it. When you told me about that letter—I——

GUSTAV : Yes ?

LIESA : I suddenly saw that——

GUSTAV : What ?

LIESA (*hesitating*) : If they really think this was an assassination, then——

GUSTAV : Go on.

LIESA : Well—you've always been against Sauder. Everyone knows that. And the police aren't complete fools.

GUSTAV : You mean—they might suspect me ?

LIESA : Yes.

GUSTAV (*agitated*) : But they've no proof. At least, no direct proof, even if Heimberger does say that—— (*He stops short.*)

LIESA : What ?

[GUSTAV does not answer.

(*Picking up letter*) May I see ?

GUSTAV (*snatching letter from her*) : Leave that alone ! (*Turning away*) It doesn't matter what he says.

[GUSTAV stuffs the letter in his pocket, and tries to pull himself together.

LIESA, you know me. You know I wouldn't kill anyone. (*Moves a few steps left.*)

LIESA : So you have always said. (*Sits on sofa.*)

GUSTAV : Don't you believe it ?

LIESA : Have I any reason not to ?

GUSTAV : Well, you sound as if you doubted it (*Pause.*) It's true I didn't exactly love Sander, but I wasn't the only one. The whole party hated him. And with good cause. There wasn't one thing we could plan without him getting wind of it. How, God knows, but he did ! It was as if he could read our very thoughts. He couldn't have known so much if he'd had a dozen spies. The damned swine ! (*Pause.*) Do you remember when three of us arranged to meet in that restaurant—a dirty little bourgeois place—the—

LIESA : The Green Dragon.

GUSTAV : That's it. Well—the meeting was an absolute secret. Only we three knew. We hadn't even been to the place before. And yet—what happened ? The police raided it that night, and we just got out in time.

LIESA : Perhaps it was only a coincidence ?

GUSTAV : Never. It was a trap. Sander's trap. And it snapped just behind us.

LIESA : Oh, let's stop talking about Sander. Someone shot him, and he's dead ; and a good thing, too. I'm sick of his very name. (*Rises and goes off into the kitchen.*)

GUSTAV (*going up left*) : Yes, blast him, so am I. Let's forget him. . . . What are we going to have for supper ?

LIESA (*off*) : I've made something you really like—just as a house-warming.

GUSTAV : What ?

LIESA (*off*) : Goulasch.

GUSTAV : Good ! Let's have it. I'm as hungry as a wolf.

[*Suddenly GUSTAV hears something on the landing outside. He listens, and then tiptoes up to the door. A newspaper shoots through the letter-box.*]

LIESA comes in, carrying a steaming dish, and GUSTAV stoops to pick up the newspaper.

LIESA : What is it ?

GUSTAV : Evening paper

LIESA : How did it get here ?

GUSTAV : I told them to deliver it in future (*He begins to open paper*)

LIESA (*putting dish on table*) : Deliver it ? My word ? We are getting superior. Now, come and sit down. Let's begin while it's hot. (*Sits left of table.*)

[*GUSTAV sits right of table and looks in the centre page of the paper*]

(*Intrigued*) Can't you look at that afterwards ? We might at least have our supper in peace—for once.

GUSTAV : All right, all right. I only want to —

LIESA : What ?

GUSTAV : The —the wireless programme.

LIESA (*serving the goulasch*) : It's always on the back page.

GUSTAV : Oh, yes—er—of course it is. (*Turning to back page*)

LIESA : But I'm afraid the news is over by now.

GUSTAV : The news !

[*GUSTAV glances at LIESA, then looks back at paper.*]

I—I wonder if there is any good dance music to-night.

LIESA (*handing him his plate*) : For heaven's sake, eat your supper.

GUSTAV : What ? Er—oh, yes. (*Puts down paper on chair on his right, and sniffs at plate*) Smells good. (*Takes a bite.*) H-m-m, and tastes even better.

LIESA : Well, so it ought to.

[*They eat in silence for a moment or two. GUSTAV keeps glancing down at the paper.*]

You're very quiet all of a sudden.

GUSTAV (*chewing*) : Can't talk with my mouth full.

[*Pause.*]

LIESA : I wanted this to be a good supper.

GUSTAV (*chewing*) : H-m-m.

LIESA : It's the first in our new flat, and it's a sort of omen for the future.

GUSTAV (*fiercely*) : Shut up !

LIESA : What's the matter ?

GUSTAV : I hate that word "omen." It's—Oh, hell !

[*GUSTAV puts down his knife and fork and turns away.*]

Lies ! I'm feeling rotten to-night.

LIESA : What's wrong with you ?

GUSTAV : Oh, nothing. I don't know. (*Looks round the room.*) I expect it's the change—the new surroundings.

LIESA : Gustav, don't be silly.

GUSTAV : I can't help it. Somehow I feel we're not going to be happy here for long.

LIESA : Why not ? (*She touches the wood of the table.*) Why shouldn't we be happy here ?

GUSTAV : How can I tell ? It's just a queer pre-sentiment I've got.

[GUSTAV sits staring in front of him, while LIESA watches him.

(Suddenly) It's a nightmare. (Rises and goes up centre)

LIESA What is ?

GUSTAV (tensely) : I can't get away from him.

LIESA From whom ?

GUSTAV (hysterically) Sander ! (Looks round as if seeing someone) He's there all the time ! He won't leave me ! (Pause, then more quietly) We've always hated each other. Everything I've done he's been mixed up in. I hated him so much that I almost liked him. (Sits again, right of table) I think he liked me, too, in the same queer way. Do you remember when he spoke to us after a meeting—when you were with me—and he was quite pleasant, almost nice ?

LIESA (disinterestedly) Oh, did we meet him ? I'd forgotten

GUSTAV But, Liesa, you can't have. It was just before we were married. It's not so long ago as all that. You must remember. You seemed quite taken with him—stood talking to him as if you enjoyed it.

LIESA (looking away) . So you can be jealous about me, after all ?

GUSTAV : Jealous of Sander ! Well—I've heard many things, but that takes the cake. No ! If I'd been the sort to like him and his ideas, I'd hardly have married me.

LIESA (quietly) : Ideas ? What are ideas ?

GUSTAV : Ideas are everything

LIESA . Perhaps for a man—but not for a woman. You see, a woman loves in a different way

from a man—neither better nor worse—but different. She loves more simply, more naturally. Ideas and reason don't come into it.

GUSTAV : That's nonsense. If you're fond of each other, of course you've the same ideas.

LIESA : Why ?

GUSTAV : Well—you can only be really certain of someone who thinks the same way as you do. Otherwise no man could even trust his own wife.

LIESA : And no wife could trust her own husband.

GUSTAV (*annoyed*) : What do you mean ?

LIESA (*quietly*) : We're all human, aren't we ?

GUSTAV (*at a loss*) : Liesa, what is the matter with you ? You're talking such rubbish. (*Looks at her keenly.*) We do love each other, don't we ?

[LIESA nods her head.

Well, then— ?

LIESA : Gustav, dearest, you know I care—of course I love you.

GUSTAV (*taking her hand*) : And I love you, Liesa. It's just since yesterday—something seems to have come over us—since that damned murder.

LIESA : Then why will you keep referring to it ?

GUSTAV : Well, after all, it was the chief thing that happened yesterday, and it seems to have affected you somehow.

LIESA (*excitedly*) : Me ! What are you saying ? You must be mad. What have I got to do with the murder ?

GUSTAV (*startled*) : You ? What have you got to do with it ? (*Pause, then quietly*) Nothing. Of course you haven't.

[GUSTAV looks at LIESA queerly.

LIESA : I'm sorry if I seem strange. It's just that I'm—terribly nervy.

GUSTAV : And miles away from me. It makes me frightened.

LILSA : What do you mean ? That I don't love you ?

GUSTAV : No. That you might leave me.

LILSA (*gently*) : I could never leave you, Gustav

GUSTAV (*shrugs*) : It's easy to say that.

LILSA : But, darling, I live only for you. I couldn't imagine living without you. (*Pause ; and then with an effort*) Do go on with your supper. It'll be cold.

GUSTAV : I don't want any more.

LILSA : You've eaten nothing. Please try to finish it.

GUSTAV : No, I can't. I'm not hungry (*Picks up the newspaper, and, rising, goes across right.*)

LILSA (*rising*) : Shall I turn on the wireless, to cheer you up ?

GUSTAV : For heaven's sake, don't. It would drive me crazy. (*Sits on sofa, and reads centre page of newspaper*)

LILSA (*quietly*) : All right. (*Getting a tray off the sideboard, she clears a few things, takes them into the kitchen, and then comes in again.*)

Well ?

[GUSTAV pays no attention.

What does it say ?

[Without answering, GUSTAV lowers the paper. His hand is shaking slightly. He looks at her, and then studies the paper again.

(*Goes across beside him.*) Won't you read it to me ?

GUSTAV (*reading*) : " Sensational turn in Sander Murder Case. Robbery not the motive." (*Pause.*)

LILSA : Go on. What else ?

GUSTAV : They've found the stolen things. They were buried close by. Police dogs discovered the place.

LIESA (*horrified*) : Police dogs ?

GUSTAV : Yes. I thought they'd put the dogs on to the trail.

LIESA : I think it's fiendish to hunt people with dogs.

GUSTAV (*after reading in silence for a few moments*, They seem to have got on to something definite though. (*Reading aloud*) " The scent taken up by the dogs led out of the wood into a near-by side-street, where an evening open-air market is held, and a young man, the owner of one of the stalls, was arrested. It is reported that he denies any knowledge of the crime, but that he has made a statement to which the police attach considerable importance. In well-informed circles there is little doubt that the crime is a political one, for the late Minister had many enemies among the members of the rival political factions. The arrested youth is known to belong to one of these."

[GUSTAV goes on reading in silence.

LIESA : Anything more ? (*Sits on sofa on his left*.)

GUSTAV : A whole lot about Sander's career. Lies mostly. You've got to be a pretty fair villain to get as good an obituary notice as this. (*Turns to back page.*) Here's something in the Stop Press (*Reads aloud*) " Sander Murder. Case takes sudden dramatic turn. Police expect to make important arrest very soon." (*Throwing down paper, he rises and goes across left.*)

LIESA : What is it ?

GUSTAV (*pacing up and down*) : The whole thing. These police dogs ! It's terrible !

LIESA : You don't think this man—the stall-keeper—did it, then ?

GUSTAV : No, I don't ; otherwise why talk about an important arrest being expected ?

LIESA . Perhaps that's just bluff.

GUSTAV : Rubbish ! The man they've got hold of made a statement. (*Slowly*) Perhaps he saw me in the woods.

LIESA : Gustav, don't !

GUSTAV : Well—they think it's a political murder. And suppose he did see me—me, of all people—what would be the natural assumption ?

LIESA . They can't prove it.

GUSTAV (*very agitated*) : They've got quite enough to arrest me on—enough to hang me on.

LIESA : There is such a thing as justice.

GUSTAV : Justice ! What is justice ? There's such a thing as the law, but that's quite different.

LIESA : At the worst, it's only—what do you call it ?—circumstantial evidence they've got against you.

GUSTAV : I wouldn't be the first man condemned on circumstantial evidence.

LIESA (*rises and moves to right centre, above dining-table*) : What about the police dogs and the scent leading to the market ? Surely that's evidence in your favour, isn't it ?

GUSTAV (*left centre, above dining-table*) : It might have been, but, you see—(*pause*)—I did come through the market.

LIESA : But you told me you came the shortest way.

GUSTAV : Look here, Liesa, I did stop for a drink last night. I couldn't help it. I didn't want to tell you. I thought you'd be angry.

LIESA : You lied to me ?

GUSTAV : Yes—only about that. I swear it I wish I had told you. But what's it matter now ? If that fellow saw me, my number's up. Would any judge believe my story if I'd been seen ?

LIESA : Why not—if you're telling the truth ?

GUSTAV : Because the best judge is only a lawyer and every lawyer believes in the law instead of justice. Which of them would listen to me ?

LIESA : You'll have a good counsel to defend you. The party will see to that.

GUSTAV (*furious*) : There you go, talking as if I were arrested already. (*Turns away from her.*)

LIESA : Don't be a fool. It's you that's talking like that, not me. To hear you, one would think there was no way of escape.

GUSTAV (*turning back to her*) : Eh ? No way of escape ?

LIESA (*slowly*) : It almost sounds as if—as if you felt you were guilty.

GUSTAV : Liesa ! What are you saying ?

LIESA : I'm only saying that it sounds as if—

GUSTAV (*interrupting*) : If you begin to doubt me what will the police do ?

LIESA : I never said I doubted you. I'll always believe in you, whatever happens. (*Pause.*) But please don't lie to me again.

GUSTAV : Lie to you ? Oh, yes—that. (*Sits centre of table*) I'm sorry ; it was silly of me. (*Pause*) Do you think this man could have seen me ?

LIESA (*moving away a little*) : I don't know, dear

GUSTAV : It's quite likely, of course. I must have passed his stall, and, if it was one near the end of the line, he was almost bound to see me coming out of the wood. Of course, it may be a put-up job—an attempt to shift the blame on to

Someone in our party. (*Stops short, and holds his head.*) Liesa, this is driving me insane.

LIESA (*sits right of table*) : Why torture yourself ?

GUSTAV : You don't expect me to feel exactly happy about it, do you ?

LIESA (*stroking his head*) : Please don't worry too much, dear.

GUSTAV : How can I help it ? And it's not just because of my own neck. I've worked and slaved all my life for one ideal Equality The equality of the human race. For years I've struggled against the preferences of classes and fought for man's rights. And I've gone on fighting when I felt I hadn't enough strength left to go on. Now, just when I seem to be getting somewhere at last, this sort of thing happens ; and every thing may be useless.

LIESA : Never useless. Your friends know what you've done.

GUSTAV : My friends will drop me quick enough, if it suits them. Do you think a big political movement has time to bother about the individual ? No one will raise a finger to help me.

LIESA : Oh, you're raving. It's all such utter nonsense. You've worked yourself up into a state about nothing.

GUSTAV : Nothing ?

LIESA : Look here, if you were in any real danger, at least your friends would have warned you.

GUSTAV : Do you think they would ? (*Considering*) Yes, that's true. (*Rises and turns away, left.*) Perhaps I am being stupid—but I seem to have got this murder on my brain. It's extraordinary, Liesa, but— (*Hesitates and turns and looks at her.*)

LIESA : But what ?

GUSTAV (*slowly*) : I feel as if, in some way, I really am mixed up in it.

[LIESA starts.

Why do you jump like that ?

LIESA : Well—it's enough to make anyone jump. What a dreadful thing to say !

[*The peculiar high-pitched horn note of a police car is heard from the street below.*

(*Jumping up*) What's that ?

[*They listen tensely as the car comes nearer. The car draws up below the window. LIESA runs to the window and peeps out.*

GUSTAV : Police ?

[LIESA nods.

Our door ?

LIESA (*turning from window*) : Yes. (*Pause.*) Wait ! It may not be for us. (*Going to door at back.*)

GUSTAV (*hysterically*) : It is. I know it is. (*Wringing his hands.*)

LIESA : Quiet a moment. (*Listens at door ; then quickly*) Do they know our new address ?

GUSTAV : I registered only this morning. Are they coming up ?

[LIESA listens again.

Liesä, you do believe me, don't you ?

[*There is the sound of voices.*

LIESA : Hush ! There's something now. (*Pause*) I think they're on the landing below. (*Pause.*) Yes, listen !

[*Someone can be heard knocking on a door. Then there is a crash, a woman shrieks, a door slams, and there is silence.*

It's not for us.

GUSTAV : How do you know ? They are probably searching all the flats, and it'll be our turn next. (Wildly) And we've got to sit and wait.

[GUSTAV sits left of table and moans, with his head in his hands.

Confused noises can again be heard, then they gradually die away, except for the sound of a woman crying.

LILSA Gustav ! They've gone !

GUSTAV : Are you sure ?

LILSA (opening door a little and peeping out) Yes.

GUSTAV (rising) Then—it wasn't for us. (Listens) What's that ?

LILSA . A woman crying.

GUSTAV (crossing to door) What have they done to her ? Let me see

LILSA No Don't go yet. Please (Trying to stop him.)

GUSTAV . Why not ? I must find out what's happened.

[GUSTAV pushes past her and goes out, closing the door behind him

LILSA covers her face with her hands and waits. Suddenly there is a noise in the street below, and she goes over to the window and looks out. The sound of the police horn is heard again as the car drives off.

The woman on the lower landing has now stopped crying, and in a few moments GUSTAV comes in and sinks into a chair right of table

LILSA (going over to him) : What was it ?

GUSTAV : They've arrested him.

LILSA : Who ?

GUSTAV . That boy who lived in the flat below us

LILSA You mean—the fair one—who was so kind and helped us with the furniture ?

GUSTAV : Yes.

LIESA : But what for ? What has he done ?

GUSTAV : He is supposed to have murdered someone.

LIESA : Murdered someone ?

GUSTAV : Yes—a woman.

LIESA : That boy ! I can't believe it.

GUSTAV : He didn't look like a murderer, did he ?

LIESA (*slowly*) : No—he didn't look like a murderer——

GUSTAV (*suddenly catching her meaning*) : Eh ? (*Rises.*) No more than I do, you mean ? (*Goes up left.*)

LIESA : Gustav ! How can you ?

GUSTAV : Well, isn't that just what people will say when the police catch me ? " He's always pretended to be against violence, but there you are. It just shows, doesn't it ? "

LIESA (*sits on sofa*) : Oh, do be quiet. I'm still feeling quite sick with the fright. I can't stand it any longer.

GUSTAV (*crossing to her*) : I'm sorry. I feel I'm being a brute to worry you like this.

LIESA (*sobbing*) : You're not a brute.

GUSTAV (*sitting on sofa beside her*) : I'm going to forget Sander and everything connected with him. Is that right ?

LIESA : Please. Can't we just think of each other instead ?

GUSTAV (*putting his arm round her*) : Yes, just you and me—and to hell with the rest. (*Kisses her.*) Just you and me. (*Quietly*) My own dear Liesa. (*Pause.*)

[*The telephone rings. They sit up and look at it*

LILSA rises and picks up the receiver.

LILSA : Hallo ! . . . Who's that ? . . . Yes, this is Mrs. Bergmann speaking. . . . My husband ? — Just a moment. (*Covering mouthpiece with her hand*) It's Heimbeiger, I think.

GUSTAV : Damn ! It'll be about Sander. I'm sorry. (*Rises.*)

LILSA Never mind. You must speak to him.

GUSTAV (*taking receiver and speaking into it*) : Hallo ! . . . Of course not. I'm very glad you rang up. . . . Yes, I've seen to-night's paper. . . . What ? . . . One of our party ? But that's absurd. (*Sits on edge of desk.*) Just before the election—it'd be political suicide. Sander living was worth a thousand votes to us ; dead, he's worth nothing. . . . Eh ? . . . You do ? . . . What do you mean ? . . . But listen, I say . . . (*Covers mouthpiece with his hand.*) Good God !

LILSA (*standing left of him*) : What is it ?

GUSTAV (*to LILSA*) : Hush ! (*Into mouthpiece*) Hallo ! Heimbeiger, tell me, what exactly have you heard ? . . . Yes, of course, I must know. . . . He described the man . . . in the woods . . . coming out. . . . Well, damn it, you saw me leave the meeting . . . Yes ? . . . Someone he didn't know. . . . What ? . . . A woman !

[LILSA is listening tensely.

Might have been. . . . Well, then . . . What's that ? . . . Give up my position ? . . . Eh ? (*Haltering*) But . . . Abroad at once. . . . My wife too. . . . For how long ? . . . Indefinitely ! (*Angrily*) Oh, yes, I'm delighted. What did you expect ? . . . Promotion ? . . . Yes, promotion into what hereafter ! . . . Go on. I'm listening. . . . (*Quietly*) I see. . . . The committee. . . . I'm sorry for what I said just now, but . . . Very well. Good night. (*He is about to put down the*

receiver, but changes his mind, and shouts into it) Heimberger! Are you there? . . . You can tell the rest of your blasted committee that I'm much obliged to them for their trust and confidence! (He bangs down the receiver, and sits motionless, staring in front of him)

LIESA (*quietly*) Gustav!

GUSTAV (*wearily*) Yes?

LIESA What does it mean?

GUSTAV (*quietly*) Evil. No, I beg your pardon. Not evil—promoted and transferred abroad—for an indefinite period. (*Rises*)

LIESA (*after a few moments' pause*) Perhaps it really is promotion.

GUSTAV (*shaking his head*) My dear child, don't be silly. (*Then slowly*) For an indefinite period.

[GUSTAV sits on the packing case, staring in front of him. LIESA sits beside him, and puts her hand on his arm.]

LIESA (*gently*) What are you thinking about?

GUSTAV I was just wondering if I ought to go to the police and tell them—

LIESA Tell them what?

GUSTAV (*slowly*) That last night I walked past the spot where the crime was committed—and didn't happen to see anything.

LIESA (*rising, horrified*) Are you mad?

GUSTAV No, but I very soon may be—if this goes on.

LIESA (*after a pause*) Who's the man Heimberger was talking about?

GUSTAV The man they've arrested.

LIESA And what has he said?

GUSTAV That he thinks one of our party did it.

LILSA But how can he? I thought he said he saw someone he didn't know? That it might have been a—a woman?

GUSTAV Yes, that's true

LILSA I don't believe he saw anyone. If you ask me, he's just making it up to save his own skin

GUSTAV (*slowly*) Yes—but—then why am I being sent abroad? (*Rises, and goes left*) No, there's something behind this that I'm not being told. I'm under suspicion. Heimberger was perfectly clear about that. (*Lp left*) But why? Why? Why? I came through the woods—but I didn't do anything there, did I? I mean I can't have done it without knowing I did it, can I? And yet I feel—

LILSA (*right centre*) What did this man think?

GUSTAV What?

LILSA That it might have been a woman?

GUSTAV (*left centre*) I don't know. Anyhow, he wasn't very definite. Just thought it might have been

LILSA Even on the darkest night you wouldn't look like a woman

GUSTAV Me? No—not me—but— (*He stares at her*)

LILSA (*nervously*) Who, then?

GUSTAV You're quite right, though. It can't have been me he saw

LILSA Well—if it wasn't you?

[GUSTAV does not answer

Going up right) Gustav, you are hopeless. First you seem to want to make me believe that it was you, and then you suddenly turn round and say the opposite. It's all so confusing. Why shouldn't it have been a woman? (*Going towards sofa*)

GUSTAV (*slowly*) : It is possible that it was a woman. And in that case the whole thing would be—just plain, sordid murder.

LIESA : Is it any more plain and sordid because a woman does it ?

GUSTAV : Not necessarily, but Sander was always having dirty affairs with women.

LIESA (*loudly*) : That's not true !

GUSTAV (*surprised*) : Oh ! And how do you know ?

LIESA (*confused*) : I— you—at least, you've never told me that about him before, and it seems mean to say it now that he's dead.

GUSTAV (*getting angry and crossing to her*) : Liesa, what is this rot you're talking ? You began by suggesting to me that a woman might have murdered Sander—for revenge, I suppose. And now you seem to want to defend the murderess. Why should you ? Murder is always murder, and——

LIESA (*interrupting*) : Don't be a pompous ass (*Sits on sofa.*)

GUSTAV (*brought up short*) : Liesa !

LIESA : You needn't pretend to be offended.

GUSTAV (*sits beside her*) : But, Liesa, dear, I'm not pretending anything ; but you've just been going for me because I didn't tell you about Sander's love-affairs. Why should I have ? The whole town knew about them, and you're probably as well up in local gossip as I am.

LIESA : I like that ! I spend my time gossiping, do I ? Hanging about street corners, discussing unsavoury love-affairs ?

GUSTAV (*trying to calm her*) : But, Liesa, dear——

LIESA (*imitating him*) : " But, Liesa, dear—— But, Liesa, dear——" Can't you say something

else for a change ? And tell me this. If a woman murdered your friend Sander, why should she be any more guilty than a man ?

GUSTAV : But, Liesa, dear, it would be quite different. I grant you that murder is always murder, and you can't get away from it ; but a political assassination is often done as a sort of muddle-headed deed of heroism. But if a woman did it—well, she is probably just some poor creature he had used and grown tired of.

LIESA : I see. According to you, no woman could be noble enough to have killed him for any of your high-sounding political reasons.

GUSTAV : You said yourself that reason didn't count with women. But why harp on this ?

LIESA : I'm not harping, only that man said he saw—a woman.

GUSTAV (*rises and goes left*) : Yes, I keep forgetting that. (*Pause, and then slowly*) Supposing it had been a woman ? (*Thinks.*) Perhaps one of — our women ? (*Left centre.*)

LIESA (*startled*) : One of our women ?

GUSTAV (*still slowly*) : That would explain a lot. (*Looks at her.*) One of our women, Liesa ! (*Going right centre.*)

LIESA (*rises*) : What do you mean ? Are you accusing me ? (*Hysterically*) That's it ! You think I did it ! Why don't you ring up the police and tell them ? Go on. (*Points to telephone.*) Tell them that you've found out all about it, and that you saw me do it. That I'm the murderess. Me—your wife ! (*Covers her face with her hands, and cries pitifully.*)

GUSTAV : Liesa ! (*Takes her in his arms.*) My poor little Liesa. You *are* such a typical woman. Always personal, never reasonable. Just what I said.

LIESA (*desperately, as she draws away from him*,
Then— Oh, my God ! Do you really believe
I did it ?

GUSTAV (*waving her away*) : For goodness' sake
stop talking like a fool Let me think for a
moment. (*Goes centre*) Yes—Sander seemed to
find out so much—knew all our plans—and—

LIESA : What has that to do with it ?

GUSTAV : Nothing, perhaps, but —

LIESA : Gustav !

GUSTAV : Oh, please be quiet

LIESA (*furiously*) : Why should I be ! I know
you think I am too stupid for you, I know
you've always thought that, but usually you
take the trouble to hide it I know you think I
am unreasonable. But I do know this. I know
that——

GUSTAV : Would you mind sparing me a list of
the things you know—just for a few minutes ?

LIESA : Are you forbidding me to speak now ?

GUSTAV (*impatiently*) : But, Liesa, dear, I really
do want to think. Couldn't you go away and
leave me alone for a quarter of an hour ?

LIESA : Are you trying to turn me out ?

GUSTAV (*wearily*) : Very well (*Goes across to
bedroom door*)

LIESA : Gustav !

[GUSTAV goes into bedroom.

*After a moment, LIESA crosses and looks into the
bedroom. GUSTAV comes in, putting on his hat and
coat.*

(*Anxiously*) Where are you going ?

GUSTAV : Out.

[GUSTAV goes towards door at back.

LIESA (*following him*) : But, where to ?

[GUSTAV *does not answer.*

GUSTAV—I only meant— Please don't go.
(*Tries to stop him*)

GUSTAV (*pushing her aside*) : Excuse me. If I can't be alone for a few minutes in my own flat, I hope you will at least permit me to go out alone. (*Ficks in his pockets.*) By the way, my woollen gloves seem to have disappeared.

[LIESA *steps back, startled.*

But I suppose I can keep my hands warm in my pockets. Good night (*Opens door*)

LIESA : Gustav !

GUSTAV (*turning*) : Well ?

LIESA : Do tell me where you're going.

[GUSTAV *stares strangely at her without answering.*

Will you—will you be away for very long ?

GUSTAV : Perhaps.

[GUSTAV *goes out, banging the door.*

LIESA : Gustav ! Don't leave me. Please don't.
(*She opens the door, and, running to the stair head, calls down*) Gustav ! . . . Come back.

(*But GUSTAV has gone, and LIESA slowly comes back into the room, and closes the door, weeping bitterly, as the*

CURTAIN DESCENDS

ACT III

SCENE : *The same as Act II.*

TIME : *Early the following morning.*

When the curtain rises, LIESA, with a rug over her legs, is asleep on the sofa. Dawn is just beginning to creep in at the window.

After a moment or two, a key turns in the lock, and GUSTAV stumbles wearily into the room and switches on the lights.

LIESA (*waking with a start*) : Gustav, dear ! I'm so glad to see you back. (*Sitting up.*)

[GUSTAV *does not answer, but stands looking at her as if half-dozed.*

Where have you been all night ? Won't you tell me ?

[GUSTAV *still does not reply.*

I was sitting up for you, but I must have fallen asleep. I'm terribly sorry about last night. Are you still angry with me, dearest ?

GUSTAV (*smiling wearily*) : No, Liesa, I'm not angry any more. (*Gives her a light kiss, and 'hums' sighs.*) Only tired—very tired.

[GUSTAV *takes off his coat and hat.*

LIESA : Do sit down, dear.

GUSTAV (*sitting heavily in a chair, right of table*) : What time is it ?

LIESA (*glancing at the clock*) : Quite early, I think. Heavens, it's after eight. I must have been asleep for hours. (*Rises and goes to him.*) Gustav, do tell me—where have you been ?

GUSTAV (*slowly*) : Where have I been ?

LIESA : Yes.

GUSTAV : Just wandering about.

LIESA : Wandering about—all night ? But why ?

[GUSTAV *does not answer.*

Can't you tell me? (*Pause.*) I'll get you some coffee.

[GUSTAV *shakes his head.*

But you must be cold. I know I'm shivering.

GUSTAV (*deliberately*): I've got to write something, and I must do it now—at once.

LILSA: Have something warm to drink first.

GUSTAV: No, not till I've done this. You see, I must do it now. Don't be angry with me.

LILSA: All right, if you feel you ought to (*Goes to the window, and begins to draw back the curtain, but suddenly stops*) The people opposite—they'll be in, and—(*hesitates*)—besides, it's only half eight yet, and — (*Draws the curtains close again.*) I'll go and tidy myself.

[LILSA *goes into the bedroom.* GUSTAV *rises and takes writing materials from the desk, and then goes back and sits on the left of the dining-table. He is obviously very ill at ease, and it is with a great effort that he takes up the pen and begins to write. He does not get far, however, for, after a few lines, he throws down the pen and sits staring at the paper. Then he suddenly tears it up, and, taking another sheet, begins again. Once more, after a few lines, he finds he cannot go on, and tears up the second sheet.*

GUSTAV (*rising and going right centric, and holding his head in his hands*): Oh, God, help me! Getting a grip of himself, he again sits down, and rewrites the letter afresh. This time his pen moves rapidly.)

[LILSA *comes in.*

LILSA: Gustav, dear!

GUSTAV: Yes—what is it?

[LILSA *is looking for something, and pulls open drawers and cupboards.*

LIESA : It's one of your gloves. (*Looking in desk*)
I can't find it anywhere.

GUSTAV : One of them ? I thought they were
both lost

LIESA : No, I've found the right one, but I can't
think where the left one's got to. Must have got
lost when we were moving. Oh, it is annoying.
They were such nice warm gloves. (*Right one in*)

GUSTAV : I expect it'll turn up. Besides, I sup-
pose you sewed my name in it.

LIESA : It had your initials—"G B."

GUSTAV : Then it's all right, or, at least, it ought
to be, according to you. If it was dropped some-
where, someone will find it, see my initials, and
bring it back. Wasn't that the idea ?

LIESA (*thinking*) : Dropped it somewhere—

GUSTAV : Anyhow, why worry ?

[*Pause*]

LIESA (*sitting right of table, opposite him*) : Gustav,
please tell me what the trouble is. I hate to see
you like this. You're so strung up and nervous,
and you looked so upset when I came in just
now. What is it ? (*Pause*) What are you writing ?

GUSTAV (*slowly*) : I'm writing a report. Him-
melfinger told me I must. The committee wanted it.

LIESA : What's it about ? (*Looks at him, and then
goes on hurriedly*) Is it so very difficult ?

GUSTAV (*pointing to the torn-up paper*) : Look.
I'm starting for the third time.

LIESA : But you've often written reports before.

GUSTAV : Not this kind of report. (*Pushes the
writing things to one side*) I can't do it. (*He
and crosses right*) I can't. (*Pause and then, turning
back to her*) Last night I walked for miles, and
I thought and thought. I tried to get things

clear. You remember that man— the one they've arrested—said that the figure he saw might have been a woman?

LISA . Well ?

GUSTAV (*crossing left*) : Well, suppose it was a woman— suppose he was right. It might be some girl who knows us—knows all of us. Perhaps she's the traitor who's been giving away our secrets.

LISA . Whatever put that in your head ?

GUSTAV : Well— at least it's possible—and then, don't you see, she may have killed Sander, either because he had dropped her or because she was afraid of being found out. (*Left centre.*)

LISA : But—— ?

GUSTAV (*turning away*) : Anyhow, that's what I told Heimberger last night.

LISA : You told him *that* !

GUSTAV : Yes. I thought it might clear the thing up

LISA : When did you see him ?

GUSTAV : Shortly after midnight.

LISA : And—what did he say ?

GUSTAV : Nothing. He just let me talk. (*Angrily*) Didn't shake hands with me, and didn't even offer me a chair.

LISA (*tensely*) : Yes—and then what ?

GUSTAV : When I had finished, he sat thinking for a moment or two, and then said : “ Well, Mr. Bergmann ”—Mr. Bergmann, if you please ; Heimberger, who's never called me that in his life before—“ Well, Mr. Bergmann, your suggestion is an interesting one—very—and, I suppose, the instinct of self-preservation is a very natural one.” And he smiled in a nasty sort of way.

LIESA : What a beast !

GUSTAV (*shrugging his shoulders*) : Wait ! Then he told me : " The committee would be very glad if you would prepare a detailed report about this murder. We should like it by to-morrow night And I would suggest that you don't leave your flat—until we have seen it "

LIESA : But—how awful ! What did you say ?

GUSTAV I couldn't speak a word at first ; I was so completely stunned Then I lost my temper I asked him what the devil he meant—why he should pick on me to write the report. I told him I knew less about the murder than he did

LIESA : What happened ?

GUSTAV He just smiled, and said it was the committee's orders. Then I really did see red—and he got angry, too, and—then it all came out (*Sits left of table*)

LIESA : What ?

GUSTAV : Heimberger and the rest of them, my friends, seem pretty certain that—I killed Sander.

LIESA : No—not that—not that !

[LIESA rises, and turns away, and then, coming back to GUSTAV, says, more quietly :

But what about this man—the man they've arrested ?

GUSTAV : He says he didn't do it, and—according to Heimberger—the police believe him

LIESA : Says he didn't do it ! That's no proof

GUSTAV : Anyhow, they've let him go.

LIESA : Why ?

GUSTAV : If there's any doubt, it's certainly better to let him go than make him suffer and find out afterwards that he's innocent.

LILSA : What nonsense ! Why should they let him go until they are sure ?

GUSTAV : Perhaps they are.

LILSA : They can't be. I know they can't be. Letting him go doesn't help anyone. It certainly doesn't help you. (*Pause*) They—they wouldn't execute him, would they ?

GUSTAV : He might be lucky and get a little matter of ten years penal servitude.

LILSA : Ten years !

GUSTAV : Twenty, more likely. But I don't expect they'll give me the alternative of penal servitude.

LILSA : It hasn't come to that yet.

GUSTAV (*slowly*) : It never will. (*In a different tone*) The problem interests me, though. After all, what is a criminal, or even a murderer ? Someone who doesn't agree with the opinion of the majority. But, if the opinion of the majority changes, he may become a national hero. Funny, isn't it ? Yet you see it in politics every day.

LILSA (*sits above table, next him*) : Why go into all that ? What really matters is, can this other man prove that he didn't do it, even if he's not guilty ?

GUSTAV : Perhaps he didn't do it, and you can hardly blame him for wanting to prove his innocence.

LILSA : Yes—but can he prove it ?

GUSTAV : How should I know ? And just because he is my—er—rival, why should I wish him harm ? If he's innocent, I hope he can prove it.

LILSA : Gustav, you're far too broad-minded.

GUSTAV : Then it's a pity others aren't.

LIESA · Yes, but the point is, they are not, and it's no good trying to protect someone else if it's going to hurt you. Can't you see that? You're more important to me than anyone or anything else in the world

GUSTAV But I'm not protecting anyone. I don't know this man. I've never even heard of him. All I'm trying to do is to justify myself in the report, and convince them of my innocence

LIESA I'm not worrying about him. The only sure way of clearing yourself is to— to suggest something.

GUSTAV Meaning?

LIESA Well—er—someone else

GUSTAV (*slowly*) · I don't think I quite understand you

LIESA I don't mean exactly someone else, but—the election is coming off, and—

GUSTAV · Are you mad? Has this thing gone to your brain?

LIESA (*faintly*) It's only that I'd do anything to save you

GUSTAV Save me, and make a blackguard of me—is that it?

LIESA (*in despair*) But I'm so terribly afraid for you. You're going to tell them the truth, and they won't believe it. You'll only lose everything, and—perhaps they *will* denounce you

GUSTAV · No, they won't

LIESA They may—to save themselves

GUSTAV You forget, I've heard my sentence. Exile—sent abroad for an indefinite period

LIESA (*tearfully*) But I don't want to go abroad now. Why should we be sent to some cold, forsaken place—away from everything? I don't want to go—I'd hate it (*Begins to cry*)

USIAV (*quietly*) : No one can force you to go with me.

LSA (*sobbing*) : But I can't live without you.

USIAV : You may have to learn to do that—forever very long.

LSA (*with sudden decision*) : Let me write the report.

USIAV : Do you realise what this report is about?

LSA : Yes, the murder, of course.

USIAV : Well —what do *you* know about it?

LSA : And what do *you* know about it?

USIAV : I can at least write what I think is the truth.

LSA : But aren't you supposed to tell them what you *know* about the murder?

USIAV : And I'm going to. I don't know anything, but I've got to write it.

LSA : It's not your affair ; and why mix yourself up in something you know nothing about?

[*Telephone-bell rings.*

USIAV (*rises, and, crossing to desk, picks up receiver*) : Yes, Bergmann speaking. . . . Who? . . . Eh, it's you, Heimberger. . . . (*Goes on rapidly for HEIMBERGER can speak.*) And what's the trouble? Is the committee waiting on the doorstep for my report? Or perhaps my dear friend Heimberger wants to talk to me privately, is that it? Nice of you to ring up. Well, you know where my flat is. . . . Eh? No time? Strangely enough, neither have I. . . . Is that so? . . . My dear, eh? But then, my life no longer interests me very much. Please, my dear Heimberger, don't hesitate to say what you want over the phone. . . . What? . . . What's that? The police have found a glove? . . .

KP

[LIESA rises, and, turning away, covers her face with her hands.

How nice for them. It must be pleasant for the police when they find something for a change I'm quite consoled. . . . Of course, I'm in it interested, but I can't do much about it, can I? . . . Oh, my report? . . . You'll call for it this evening? How charming of you. I shall be delighted. . . . Good morning. (*Puts down receiver.*)

[LIESA comes a few paces towards him.

LIESA (*trembling*): The police have found glove?

GUSTAV (*turning to her*): Yes; probably the one I've lost—although I didn't happen to have gloves with me that night. Lucky, wasn't it (*Laughs.*)

[LIESA draws back in horror.

Shall I tell the police I've lost a glove?

[LIESA tries to speak, but cannot, and sobs and shakes her head.

Why not?

LIESA (*on the verge of collapse*): Don't tell them, don't—that would be madness.

GUSTAV: But why not?

LIESA: Swear you won't tell them.

GUSTAV (*taking her arm, he forces her back, until she is against the table, centre*): Why not, Liesa? What is the position? Sander was murdered—but that can't have upset you so very much. My friends have turned against me—so-called friends often do. An old glove has been found—well, that's of no importance to us. . . . What's wrong with you?

LIESA (*sobbing*): The glove—

GUSTAV (*shaking her*): What about the glove

LIESA (*hoarsely*) : It—it must be your glove.

GUSTAV : My glove ! But how could it be my glove ? How could my glove, which I didn't have with me, get to the place where—where Vander was murdered ?

LIESA : I don't know.

GUSTAV : But you don't even know what the glove they found looks like ?

[LIESA is about to speak, but GUSTAV interrupts her.

Stop ! Wait a moment. We'll soon find out.

[GUSTAV goes to the telephone, and dials a number.

LIESA sits right of table, sobbing loudly.

Be quiet, can't you ! Hallo ! . . . Hallo ! . . .
Jaahn ! (*Shakes the receiver.*) Hallo ! . . . Is that you, Heimberger ? . . . Bergmann speaking.
Look here, I didn't quite follow what you said about that glove they'd found. . . . Yes, well, what sort of a glove is it ? Can you describe it ?
. . . You don't know ? . . . A man's glove. . . .
Is that all ? . . . Thanks (*With decision*) Now I'm going to tell you something.

[LIESA jumps up, and tries to tear the receiver from him.

LIESA : No ! No !

GUSTAV (*pushing her away*) : Listen, Heimberger ! We've lost a glove. It got lost yesterday when we were moving—or rather, I expect it was stolen, probably for this very purpose, to implicate me. . . .

[LIESA goes into the bedroom, weeping.

But it's funny the police didn't find it at once—you see what I mean ? . . . What ? . . . Found it yesterday morning, but kept it secret ? . . .
Slowly That's very strange. . . . Near where the things were buried ? I see. . . . Well—thank you. (*Quietly*) Good-bye.

[GUSTAV stands for a moment, thinking, and then slowly crosses left, and sits left of the table.

LIESA comes in from the bedroom, carrying a grey woollen glove, which she lays in front of GUSTAV.

GUSTAV, still deep in thought, mechanically picks up the glove and examines it. Then, with a start, he realises what he is doing.

Here, what's this?

LIESA (*right of table*) : The glove which I found this morning.

GUSTAV. You mean the *other* glove—not the missing one?

LIESA : Yes.

GUSTAV Very clever of the thief to leave me with one, so that it can be found here. (*Looks inside the glove*) Yes, "G B" sewn inside it (*Rises.*) Very practical. So useful A clever thief—

[GUSTAV throws the glove on the table, and suddenly seizes LIESA's wrist, and shouts at her.

Say it was a clever thief. Go on, say it!

LIESA (*tearing herself free*) : No, I won't!

GUSTAV (*catching hold of her arm*) : Say it, can't you?

LIESA (*breaking away, and backing across the room against the kitchen door*) Never! I won't! I won't!

[GUSTAV swings round to the sideboard, and takes a Mauser pistol from a drawer.

GUSTAV : Are you going to agree with me, Liesa?

LIESA : No—and you can shoot, if you like.

GUSTAV (*raising the pistol*) I damned well will.

LIESA (*cowering*) Go on, then, shoot! Shoot! And let them find two rounds missing.

GUSTAV (*dropping his arm*) : Two rounds ?

LISA : Yes.

GUSTAV : But I've fired no shot from this.

LISA (*very quietly*) : But I have.

GUSTAV (*staring at her, stupefied*) : You have ?
You !

[*Pause. GUSTAV seems to droop, and slowly goes to the table and lays the pistol on it. Then he turns, and staggers towards the bedroom door.*]

LISA (*darting forward, and gripping his arm*) :
Listen ! Gustav ! You've got to listen to me.

GUSTAV (*staring at her vacantly*) : Why ? I don't
want to hear anything ; I don't want to know
anything.

LISA : You must listen.

GUSTAV (*with sudden urgency*) : You must get
away.

LISA (*imploringly*) : Gustav !

GUSTAV (*advancing on her*) : For heaven's sake,
woman, run, run, run !

LISA (*backing away down right centre*) : Please !

GUSTAV : Get out while there's still time.

LISA (*right centre*) : Gustav ! I can't go.

GUSTAV (*right centre*) : Or don't you want to
miss the fun ? (*Laughs hysterically.*) Are you trying
to make it more difficult for me ? To make sure
that I won't miss any of the pain—to enjoy the
sensation to the full—to get your thrill—is that
it ?

LISA (*beseechingly*) : Do listen to me. Gustav,
I beg you ; I beseech you. Gustav, I must tell
you.

GUSTAV : Must ? Why must ?

LISA : Because I've got to make you under-
stand.

GUSTAV : Why—what's the good ? Go on, then

LIESA : But, darling, until to-day—until this very moment—you've always trusted me. Can't you trust me for a few minutes longer ? I can't have been everything to you for all these years, and now suddenly have become just nothing.

GUSTAV (*haltingly*) : I'm sorry—I don't know what I'm saying. . . . Yes, I've trusted you. It's always been just you and me together. Now, nothing matters any more. (*Slumps into the chair, right of table.*)

LIESA : Doesn't the truth matter to you ?

GUSTAV : Truth ? (*He shakes his head.*) The truth has killed me.

[LIESA crouches on the floor beside him. There is a moment's pause.]

LIESA : Yesterday, when you talked of Sander and his women, you were right. He had many women—and I was one of them. (*She bows her head, and then goes on*) He met me first that time you talked of. When you and I were engaged. It began then. A few days later he came to my father's shop. He asked about you, and I told him how we couldn't get married because you were getting such rotten pay, and he was terribly nice, and said he'd like to help us, but that I mustn't tell you anything about it. He said you were too proud to accept things from him. Then he asked me to go and see him that evening, he said he wanted to tell me the details of his plan.

GUSTAV (*dully*) : Yes—then ?

LIESA : I felt so glad and happy because I was able to do something for you. He was charming—couldn't have been nicer. He told me it was difficult, you being a foreigner, but that everything would be all right. He said he'd talked to influential people, and had recommended you to Heimberger.

GUSTAV : To Heimberger ?

LIESA : Yes, and he said not to worry—that we'd see the results soon. Then he asked if I'd grant him just one request. It was nothing really. He wanted to take me out one evening. I remember he said that an attractive woman like me ought to be taken to nice places— to see nice things, and be seen. That I ought to know the pleasures a big city has to offer. Naturally I was pleased, and in the end—I said, " Yes."

GUSTAV : And then— you got to know— the pleasures of a big city ?

LIESA : He took me to the—the Grand Hotel.

GUSTAV : So you had been there ?

LIESA : Yes. We dined there and danced, and— had lots to drink. Far too much. You always made fun of me for being too respectable, and I wanted to prove to myself that I wasn't, for once. And when he offered to drive me home in his big car—I let him. Then he suggested having one more drink at his house. Perhaps it was doped, but—I expect I was just very drunk. *Faintly*) I don't really remember much more. *Pause.*)

[GUSTAV sits motionless. LIESA leans her head against his knee.

Sobbing) I can't tell you what I've suffered since that night. The humiliation, the bitterness. And not only then, but afterwards——

GUSTAV (*horrified*) : You mean, you've kept on going to him ?

LIESA : Yes. I had to, but he never touched me again. It was worse than that. If it had only been that, I might have borne it—for only I would have suffered.

GUSTAV : Only you ?

LIESA : You don't understand.

GUSTAV : Oh, yes, I understand.

LIESA . No, you don't—you can't.

GUSTAV : I should have thought it simple enough

LIESA You're wrong. At first I thought it simple. Heimbeiger helped you—you got a better job, you were asked to speak at the party meetings; the committee became interested in you, and you began to get on. Everything Sander had promised—

GUSTAV (*interrupting*) Then—I owe everything to him?

LIESA Nearly everything

GUSTAV (*aghast*) And I thought it was my own doing. And all the time he was laughing behind my back.

LIESA (*brokenly*) . Gustav !

GUSTAV (*holding his head in his hands*) I don't want to hear any more.

LIESA Don't you want to know the whole truth?

GUSTAV Can't you spare me the rest?

LIESA . It's got to be told, Gustav. And—we mayn't have much time left.

[GUSTAV *nods resignedly*.

To begin with, everything seemed all right. Then, after a month or two, he sent me his first letter—not through the post; they were always delivered by hand, when you were out. He wrote quite kindly, and said he had a few things to talk to me about—things in your interest, which he was sure I would like to hear. Would I please go round and see him again?

GUSTAV . And—you went?

LIESA : How could I help myself ? He was very polite, and talked about a lot of things. Then he asked me questions. . . . What were you doing ; how were you getting on ; when were you going to speak at the meetings ? Oh, he was clever, but I soon saw what he was after, and I refused to answer. He just laughed, and said I would in the end. It would be such a pity if he had to tell you what had happened. It wasn't only a threat to me, for he explained exactly what the knowledge would mean to you. He said he would like the answers to his questions next day at late st.

GUSTAV (*tensely*) : And— ?

LIESA : And next day he got his answers.

[GUSTAV covers his face with his hands, and begins quietly, but gets louder as he loses control of himself.]

GUSTAV : So you were the informer—you. But no, I can't believe it. It's impossible. I won't believe it. I hid nothing from you. I had no secrets, and you asked me to tell you everything. You pretended you were interested, and I was glad. And it was only to hand it on to him ! But this can't be true ! It can't ! I must be dreaming. Liesa, tell me that I'm dreaming.

LIESA : You are not dreaming, Gustav. I've finished now. Once I was tangled up in the net, it was hopeless. Sander's demands became more and more insistent. And I—I only loved you.

GUSTAV : Loved me ?

LIESA : It was only because I loved you. Can't you imagine what it meant to a woman to love a man to distraction, and to have no choice but either to deceive him, or to lose him and—and destroy him ? Not simply kill him, but destroy him absolutely and finally for ever. All his work all he had done—all he longed for—and all the future he had built up for himself. I went on my knees before Sander, and I begged and

implored him. And he just laughed at me. (*Pause.*) Oh, God ! How I hated myself !

GUSTAV : And this has gone on for years !

LIESA : I felt I could bear it no longer. I knew when Sander walked in the woods—I'd often met him there—and you had forgotten your pistol. It all seemed so simple. It was the one way out. (*Pause ; then quietly*) I shot him in the back of the head—from quite close—and he never made a sound. Then I felt slightly sick, and very tired, and—and almost happy.

GUSTAV : He died too easily !

LIESA : That's all. I hid his note-case, and the other things, so as to put the police off the scent, and I wore your gloves so as not to leave fingerprints I thought I was being clever. I could have sworn I brought the gloves back with me, but I must have dropped one of them.

[*A pause, as GUSTAV sits motionless.*

Gustav !

[*GUSTAV makes no sign.*

(*Emphasising each word*) I am glad that I killed him.

[*GUSTAV looks up, his eyes staring wildly.*

GUSTAV : So am I. But he got off too lightly.

[*GUSTAV's fingers claw the table as his passion and madness shake him.*

He should have been torn limb from limb ; his eyes should have been gouged out ; his tongue should have been torn out by the roots. He should have been put like a squirrel in a drum, to run and run until he spat out his lungs bit by bit, and his heart burst through his ribs. The fiend !

[*GUSTAV's hands drop by his sides, and he looks vacantly in front of him.*

LIESA (*quietly*) : Gustav, Sander is dead !

GUSTAV : Yes, he's dead. (*Rises and speaks almost calmly*) Liesa, you've got to get away I'll take everything on myself.

[LIESA rises.

I'm finished, anyhow. (*Urging her*) Go, at once, while there's still time. They may be here at any moment.

LIESA : No, dear, I'm not going. (*Backing away from him, and kneeling on the sofa*)

GUSTAV (*urgently*) . But you can't stay here—you must go. They'll catch you, too, and then . . . Don't you understand ? One slip, one word wrong, and you'd be lost.

LIESA (*quietly*) : I killed Sander.

GUSTAV : But they don't know that ; they'll think it was me.

LIESA (*firmly*) : I killed Sander.

GUSTAV : You're—you're not going to confess ?

LIESA . Yes.

GUSTAV (*holding her hands*) : But you mustn't—you can't. For my sake you can't Do you think that's any help to me ? I'm done—I'm finished ; nothing will help me.

LIESA : I know, and that's why I'm staying.

GUSTAV (*appealingly*) . But, Liesa, dear, be sensible. Why should they catch both of us ?

LIESA : They won't. They're not going to catch you. Isn't that true ?

GUSTAV (*quietly*) : Yes. But that's all the more reason why you should go.

LIESA : No, Gustav, dear, we've always done everything together, and I can't leave you now. I must stay and face this with you.

GUSTAV : No, no, not this. Not this. (*He sinks on to the sofa, and buries his head in her lap.*)

LIESA : Why not ? It needs no sacrifice. What would be left for me here, without you ? How could I live on by myself ?

GUSTAV (*crying*) : But, Liesa—my little Liesa. I want you to go on living.

LIESA (*shaking her head*) : We've all got to die some time.

GUSTAV . Yes, sooner or later.

LIESA : Does it matter if it's a little sooner ?

[*Pause.*]

GUSTAV (*quietly*) : Perhaps not. (*He sits up, and wipes his eyes.*) We are only poor, haunted creatures--haunted by death from the moment of our birth ; stumbling till we trip and fall ; trip over a pin—or a glove. And, when we fall, that is the end. Oh, God above, if You exist, have You no power against the gods of earth ? If You exist, why do You kill the truth ? (*Shouting* Oh, God, why rage against Yourself ?

LIESA (*softly*) . Gustav, the blame is mine, not God's. He loves us, and is merciful.

GUSTAV (*loudly*) : Then let Him show His mercy (*Suddenly afraid*) Liesa, is there no escape ?

LIESA : You mean—can we run away ?

GUSTAV (*sighs*) : No. I can't do that, and there's no sense in it.

LIESA : Perhaps there's still a chance. (*Rising* The glove—the police may miss the clue.

GUSTAV (*rising, and going to table*) : But it's got my initials on it. (*Picks up the glove.*) Look—"G. B." They can't miss that. With those initials, they're bound to think of me. (*Lays the glove on the table again*)

LIESA : Then—why the delay ? Why haven't they come ?

GUSTAV : I don't know—unless Heimberger made a mistake. And yet he couldn't have. He said a glove—a man's glove. (*Pause.*) Wait ! What's the time ? (*Looking at clock*) Yes—the news. (*Pointing*) The wireless news. It will be on in a moment.

[GUSTAV goes up and switches on the wireless.

The wireless begins. An organ is playing softly.

LIESA : Gustav, let me stand beside you. May I hold your hand ?

[GUSTAV holds out his hand, and LIESA takes it. They stand side by side, in front of the wireless, waiting.

The music ceases.

I love you, Gustav—only you.

GUSTAV : And I love you.

[After a moment's delay, the VOICE of the Announcer is heard.

VOICE : This is the Morning News Service. Weather Forecast for to-day : easterly winds and bright in most places, but some rain or sleet is expected on high ground later.

LIESA (*as the VOICE goes on*) : Oh, why can't he hurry up ?

GUSTAV (*patting her shoulder*) : Steady ; steady.

VOICE : We are asked to announce that the Six-Day Bicycle Race, which begins at the Stadium this evening, will start at eight-thirty and not at eight o'clock as previously advertised. (*Pause.*) The Sander Murder.

[GUSTAV and LIESA stand tense.

An important discovery was made yesterday. A glove was found near the scene of the crime, and the police consider that it has a direct connection with the case. They have every hope that the mystery will shortly be cleared up. An arrest is expected almost immediately. . . . That is all

the news this morning. In a few minutes we are going over to the studio, to hear a concert of popular music.

LIESA (*hopelessly*) : Well, it's finished ! They shouldn't be long in coming now. (*Moves slowly down right.*)

[*The interval signal is heard.*]

GUSTAV *picks up the pistol, puts it in his pocket, and then speaks with a strange calm.*

GUSTAV (*going up to her*) : Come, dear, we are going to sleep. Liesa, little sweetheart, I am tired—terribly tired.

[GUSTAV *takes LIESA's arm.*]

(*Leading her towards the bedroom door*) Come, my darling.

[*Near the door, LIESA stops and hesitates.*]

Liesä, you're coming with me, aren't you ?

[LIESA *clings to him and sobs, and then they both go into the bedroom.*]

For a moment or two only the wireless interval signal is audible.

Suddenly LIESA cries out in terror.

LIESA (*off*) : No, no ! I can't ! Gustav, don't ! Gus——

[*A shot rings out, and a moment later it is followed by a second shot.*]

The interval signal has stopped, and immediately the Announcer's VOICE is heard again.

VOICE : We have just been asked to make a further announcement regarding the Sander Murder Case. The owner of the leather glove which was found in the woods, has now been traced. He lost the glove more than a week ago, and the police are satisfied that he had nothing to do with the crime. The concert will follow at once.

[*There is a knock on the door at the back. The knock is repeated, and then an OLD WOMAN'S VOICE is heard.*

WOMAN'S VOICE (*shouting loudly, off*) : Liesa !

[*She knocks again.*

LIESA ! Are you in ? It's Mother Mertens.

[*The Announcer's VOICE is heard.*

VOICE : This is the Studio Orchestra.

WOMAN'S VOICE (*off*) : What's that ?

VOICE : We are beginning our concert with the march, "Radetzky," by Johann Strauss.

WOMAN'S VOICE (*shouting, off*) : All right, Mr. Bergmann. It's only your glove. I took it by mistake yesterday. I expect you've been needing it.

[*A woollen glove, similar to the one on the table, comes through the letter-box, and hangs as if caught by the flap.*

The opening bars of the "Radetzky March" crash out from the wireless, and as the joyful air re-echoes through the deserted room, into which the rays of the morning sun are now streaming through the window, the

CURTAIN DESCENDS

GRIEF GOLS OVER

Merton Hodge

GRIEF GOES OVER

A Play
in Three Acts

“ Poor straws ! On the dark flood we catch awhile,
Cling, and are borne into the night apart.
The laugh dies with the lips, love with the lover,
and Grief Goes Over.”—*Rupert Brooke.*

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1. D. Peters, 4 & 5 Adam Street, Adelphi, London, W C 2*

To
AURIOL

Other Play by the same Author :
THE WIND AND THE RAIN

CHARACTERS

BLANCHE OLDHAM

DAVID	}	Her three sons
IONY		
KIM		

LADY MADDOX Her sister-in-law

JUDITH David's wife

MARY LOU MALING

HESTER A maid

JOAN TREVOR

NANNY

POLICE SERGEANT

SCENES

ACT I

SCENE I : A room in Blanche Oldham's house
in Knightsbridge. Late afternoon, in
spring

SCENE II : The same. Later that evening

ACT II

SCENE I : Mary Lou's flat in Chelsea. Four
months later

SCENE II : The same. An afternoon two months
later

ACT III

SCENE I : Blanche's room. Seven months later

SCENE II : The same. Nearly a year later

Grief Goes Over was first produced at the Opera House, Manchester, on May 20th, 1935, and opened in London, at the Globe Theatre, on June 6th, 1935, with the following cast

<i>Hester</i>	DORA BARTON
<i>Tony Oldham</i>	RONALD WARD
<i>Linda Maddox</i>	WINIFRED OUGHTON
<i>Blanche Oldham</i>	SYBIL THORNDIKE
<i>Kim Oldham</i>	GEOFFREY NARIS
<i>Mary Lou</i>	MARY JONES
<i>David Oldham</i>	CLIVE MORRIS
<i>Judith</i>	SYLVIA COLTRIDGE
<i>Police Sergeant</i>	GEORGE CHAMBERLAIN
<i>Nanny</i>	ILLIOT MASON
<i>Joan Trevor</i>	HILLEN VANCE

Play directed by ALFRED LEE

ACT I

SCENE I

SCENE The library of BLANCH OLDHAM'S house in Knightsbridge, London S W 3 It is late spring, and the time is about six thirty p m

The room is well furnished, carpeted and curtained. It is an "old" room and definitely Edwardian, lived in, and intimate filled with family things, but expressive of a woman with discrimination and taste.

A door down R (actors) to hall and stairs. An oval window L with heavy curtains which can be drawn across. There are the usual chairs, chesterfield, lamps, and many flowers—the fireplace is massed with them for it is spring. The fireplace is G back and on either side are bookshelves reaching almost to the ceiling. They are filled with many leather-backed books which are for the most part, old law books. They have not been opened for years. On the mantel are intimate "family" things—photographs, miniatures, etc. A telephone is on a small table to the L, and a rather lovely old desk back L.

At the rise of the curtain two bridge tables occupy the centre of the room. On them are recently used packs of cards, scorers, pencils, ash-trays, etc—all rather disarranged. There has obviously been bridge going on here. The curtain rises on HESTER, a middle-aged maid, who is in the process of tidying the room, folding card-tables, etc. The door L opens and TONY enters.

TONY is twenty-four, fair, attractive, restless, weak, but with charm. He is extremely nervy, jerky, and appears to be under a degree of tension, which he is endeavouring to cover up under an assumed air of banter. He carries a copy of the "Evening Standard". He enters the room as though not expecting anyone to be there. He assumes a casual manner on finding HESTER.

TONY (*casually*) : Oh, hullo, Hester.

HESTER (*busy with card-tables*) : Good evening, Mr. Tony. I didn't hear you come in.

TONY (*his speech is jerky*) : Had my key. What's been going on here ? The old girls been fighting over the cards again ?

HESTER : The mistress had a few in to bridge this afternoon. They played in here, but they had tea in the drawing-room.

TONY : Oh (*Briefly*) I see.

[*He automatically glances through the "Evening Standard."* He looks up

Where is mother ?

HESTER . She's gone round to the bridge club, sir with one or two of them that were here. It's to fix up about some charity "do" they're having there next week.

TONY (*resuming his paper*) : Good Lord ! Another one ?

HESTER . You see, sir, she's on the committee. It's to raise money for some "Home," I think she said.

TONY . Oh Borstal or something, I suppose !

HESTER . Something like that, I expect, sir. She won't be long. She wants to be here when Mr. Kim arrives.

TONY : Yes, of course (*Casually*) What train's he coming on ? Do you know ?

HESTER . He's motoring down with some other young gentleman from Rugby. His trunk came this morning. It'll be nice having him back.

TONY : Yes (*Continuing with his paper*) Oh . . . er . . . by the way, Hester . . . I won't be dining at home to-night.

HESTER . Oh, sir ! Mr. Kim'll be so disappointed. You're his favourite. You know that,

Mr. Tony. Mr. and Mrs. David are coming too, and everything . . .

TONY (*vaguely irritated*) : Yes, I know, but . . . (*he folds the "Evening Standard"*) . . . I have to go out.

HESTER (*a little reprovingly*) : Your mother was expecting you to stay in I've laid for you.

TONY (*blandly*) : Er . . . get me a whisky and soda, will you, Hester ? I've got a foul head.

HETTER (*a little hesitant and apprehensive*) : Yes, sir, but . . . would you like some aspirin ?

TONY : It's not that kind of a head.

[*She looks at him for a moment, and is about to go to the door when the front-door bell rings. It can be faintly heard in this room.*

Better see who that is first.

HESTER : Yes, sir.

[*She goes out.*

TONY *lights a cigarette with shaky fingers. He suddenly droops. He sits down and runs his hands through his hair.*

TONY (*a little desperately*) : Oh, God !

[*He sits up, ward, his head in his hands. HESTER returns.*

HESTER (*from the door*) : Lady Maddox is calling, sir.

[*TONY sits up, dully. LINDA MADDOX's voice is heard through the doorway*

LINDA (*off*) : It's all right, Hester. I'll wait for her.

HESTER (*half off*) : Yes, my lady.

LINDA (*coming into the room*) : Oh ! It's you, Tony ?

[*LINDA MADDOX is a gaunt woman of forty-eight. She is well, but conventionally, dressed. She is the only sister of the late Henry Oldham (TONY's father). She and TONY are mutual irritants.*

TONY (*with an effort at charm*) : Good afternoon, Aunt Linda. Er . . . mother's out at present

LINDA I know Have you any objection to my waiting for her ?

TONY : None in the least. Won't you sit down ?

[*She does so, commencing to draw off her gloves, as if to stay*

Cigarette ? (*Offering her one from his case*)

LINDA . No, thank you

TONY (*snapping case*) 'Course not I forgot Do you mind . . . mine ?

LINDA Not at all

TONY (*with great sarcasm*) That's not one of the vices in me to which you object ?

LINDA (*turning in her chair, and looking at him*) You look as though you had been practising them all ! What have you been doing to yourself ?

TONY (*lounging insolently*) Living with a black woman in Clapham, Aunt Linda

LINDA (*coldly*) I shouldn't be at all surprised

TONY . No ?

LINDA No

TONY I'm sorry to disappoint you

[*She looks at him scathingly, and changes the subject*

LINDA : I came over here to borrow something from your mother Not to discuss your idiocies I want her to lend me a cocktail shaker she's got.

TONY (*amused*) Going a little gay, aren't you ?

[*LINDA is irritated*

But . . . I congratulate you ! You're coming out, aren't you ! After all these years !

[*TONY regards her with amusement.*

You always get away with something, don't you, Aunt Linda? (*He lounges on the sofa.*) Living is so expensive. (*Speculatively*) I wish I had that art!

LINDA: Don't be so rude

TONY (*continuing in the same tone*): Do . . . all your friends lock up the spoons when you call?

LINDA (*turning, and addressing him*): I suppose you think it's clever to say things like that, Tony?

TONY (*laughing, and more easily*): Just my fun, auntie dear! Just my fun! I've got a tremendous sense of fun!

LINDA: You'd never speak to me like that, if your poor dear father was alive!

TONY: It . . . must be very rough on you, Aunt Linda, no longer having a "big brother" to stand up for you

LINDA: Your mother's brought you up *all* wrong! You've been completely spoiled, Tony. David is the only one of you that is any good!

TONY: Oh, come, Aunt Linda!

[HESTER enters with whisky and soda siphon. She places them on the drink table.]

Oh . . . thanks, Hester.

[He crosses, and pours himself out a "double."
LINDA watches him, disapprovingly.]

(To LINDA) Perhaps you'll join me in this?

LINDA: It's disgusting, at your age.

[TONY tosses off the drink.]

That won't get you anywhere!

TONY: Have one? There's no charge!

LINDA (*genuinely puzzled*): Why are you like this, Tony?

TONY: Like what?

LINDA (*disgustedly*): You're a fine example for Kim, I must say. Your mother will be very glad to have *him* home.

TONY : Meaning . . . I'm not much use to her ?

LINDA : You don't *deserve* a good home. You'd be better out of this house altogether, Tony, You're a very bad influence !

TONY : I'm beginning to feel rather picturesque I don't think anyone has ever called me "an influence" before.

LINDA : Is this all you learned at Oxford ? Why don't you get a steady job ?

TONY (*a little shaken, but still with bravado*)
I'm . . . quite happy !

LINDA (*disgustedly*) : Happy ! No one is happy unless he's achieved something.

TONY : Ah . . . but I've achieved quite a lot I got very drunk last night, Aunt Linda, on four and six !

LINDA : Of course, you're impossible

TONY : You couldn't do it (*laughs*) . . . unless you fumbled Try it some time You'd have achieved something (*Relenting, and crossing to her, patting her shoulder as he crosses to door R*) Poor old auntie. Will you excuse me ? I have to go and dress.

LINDA : Some other debauch, I suppose !

TONY (*making for door*) : Yes, dear I'm going down to *Limehouse* to smoke opium !

[*He moves to the door, and BLANCHE comes in. They almost collide.*]

(*To BLANCHE*) Oh ! Hullo, mother. Aunt Linda's here Simply champing at the bit for you. She's got a secret !

BLANCHE (*putting her hand on his shoulder and scrutinising his face*) Where are you going, dear ?

TONY (*affectionately*) : To a knitting circle, darling, in the South Kensington Museum !

[*He goes out, gayly. BLANCHE turns and looks after him. She is vaguely worried. BLANCHE OLDHAM is forty-nine. She wears an afternoon frock, and hat. She is a vague, charming person, with a great sincerity underneath. She is very sure, really.*

BLANCHE (*turning to LINDA, and coming into the room*): I didn't know you were coming over, Linda

LINDA (*extremely irritated*): I'm rather sorry that I did

BLANCHE: Oh? Why, dear?

LINDA: Tony has been so unbearably rude to me.

BLANCHE: Oh (*She turns and looks at the closed door*) Oh, you mustn't mind Tony, Linda (*Much more cheerfully, and drawing off her gloves*) He's always making things out to be worse than they are . . . Why? What did he say?

LINDA (*baldly*): He said he was going down to Limehouse to smoke opium!

[BLANCHE looks at her. She gives a relieved little laugh]

BLANCHE: That's not rude, dear. That's funny! Of course he isn't! He always talks like that. He . . . just loves . . . to be spectacular!

LINDA: Well . . . if he were my boy, Blanche, I should be very worried about him.

[BLANCHE looks at her. She is a little worried]

BLANCHE (*kindly*): Well, he isn't, is he, dear? Oh, I hope I can trust my own family, Linda. (*Quite cheerfully, and meaning it.*) I've brought them up for the last ten years, all on my own.

LINDA: That's what I mean!

BLANCHE (*laughing*): Really, Linda, they're my family.

LINDA: David's different. But, then, he's more like the Oldhams!

BLANCHE (*patiently*) Oh, David has done very well, but you mustn't be hard on Tony. He's a totally different temperament.

LINDA Well, I suppose it's none of my business.

BLANCHE No, dear.

LINDA Yes. Well, what I really came in here for was to borrow something from you.

BLANCHE Oh?

LINDA I want you to lend me a cocktail shaker. I know you've got one. I've seen it.

BLANCHE Yes, I have. I've got two. An old metal thing, and a lovely new crystal one.

LINDA That's the one I mean.

BLANCHE Tony gave it to me, for my last birthday.

LINDA Oh (*Rather set back*) I didn't know he gave it to you. I think perhaps I'd better not have it, then.

[BLANCHE gets up, and crosses to the bell.]

BLANCHE I don't think Tony will mind.

LINDA That's not what I meant.

BLANCHE Hester shall get it for you (*Returning to chair*). There are six glasses that go with it, you'd better have those too.

LINDA It's very kind of you, Blanche.

BLANCHE Rubbish! I wish you could have been here with us all to-night. David and Judith are coming.

LINDA Yes, I know. I'm sorry to miss Kim's home-coming, and David and Judith, but the Howards are going back to the country to-morrow. I thought I'd better give them cocktails. I feel they'll expect it.

BLANCHE Sherry's much easier.

LINDA (*ignoring this, and continuing*) I thought I'd give them side-cars. They are . . . called . . . "side-cars," aren't they?

BLANCHE : That's right, dear. Side-cars.

LINDA (*tentatively*) : Now . . . what exactly is in a side-car . . . exactly ?

BLANCHE (*vaguely*) : Oh . . . just . . . just . . . things . . . and . . . and . . . lots of ICE. . . .

LINDA : Oh.

[HESTER *enters*.

HESTER : You rang, madam ?

BLANCHE : Yes, Hester. I want you to wrap up my best cocktail shaker and glasses, and put them all in a box for Lady Maddox.

HESTER : Yes, madam. (*She makes to go.*)

BLANCHE : Thank you. And, oh, Hester. . . .

[HESTER *hesitates*.

Just write down the names of all the things Mr. Tony puts into side-cars on a piece of paper, and . . . and . . . slip it into the box for Lady Maddox.

HESTER : Certainly, madam.

[*She goes out.*

BLANCHE (*to LINDA*) : You will be careful of them, won't you, Linda ? They're such pretty things.

LINDA : Of course. Thank you very much for them, Blanche.

BLANCHE (*relaxing*) : Such an afternoon here ! Everyone quarrelled so horribly. I hate it when they do it in my house. Bridge can be a most unpleasant game.

LINDA (*laughing*) : Why do you play so much, then ?

BLANCHE : Oh, I don't know, dear. One has to do something, and . . . well . . . it's good for your brain.

LINDA : Oh.

BLANCHE (*laughing*) : I'm not nearly as bad as I was. I don't think I'll ever really be a card player. Still, I only lost thirty shillings to-day—and that was my partner's fault. She simply would *not* lead out her trumps. (*Suddenly*) What's the time, dear? That clock's never right.

LINDA (*glancing at her wrist watch*) : Twenty to seven.

BLANCHE (*starting up*) : Oh ! Good heavens ! Then it *is* right. Kim should be here any minute. He said half past six. I hope they're all right in that car ! They will go so fast, and there are so many more accidents nowadays.

LINDA : Of course he's all right. (*Paust.*) Now that he is going to be at home, Blanche, I only hope you are not going to let him go about with Tony too much. . . .

[BLANCHE has risen and crossed to desk. She turns

BLANCHE : Why not, dear ? They're brothers.

LINDA (*significantly*) : Yes.

BLANCHE (*dismissing interference*) : Kim can make his own friends. He's got lots. The problem will be for later on, and what he wants to do. Though we're not bothering about that until the summer holidays are over. There will be time enough then to think about it all. We're going to the cottage for a bit, and then we may go over to France. Le Touquet, or somewhere. It would be fun for them.

LINDA : All of you ?

BLANCHE : Well, Kim and I, and . . . Tony I hope. Mary Lou will probably come with us

LINDA : Mary Lou ?

BLANCHE : Why not ? She's often been on holidays with us.

LINDA : I know.

BLANCHE : Don't you like that child, Linda ? I almost feel as though she were my own daughter. Why, I've mothered her for years !

LINDA : I never understood why you took so much trouble.

BLANCHE : I never had a daughter, Linda, and her mother was my best friend. Besides, being an orphan isn't much fun, with only that silly old Dick Acton for a guardian. She's an attractive mite.

LINDA (*grudgingly*) : Well . . . she's original.

BLANCHE : Yes, isn't she ? (*In quieter mood*) I wish her parents could see her now. Poor darlings. Seventeen years since the *Lusitania*. *There's* the tragedy of death, Linda. They'll never know how charming she is. (*Sighs.*) I wish Harry could see his boys.

LINDA : Kim and she seem great friends !

BLANCHE (*happily*) : Always have been.

LINDA : Well . . . don't let them get beyond you !

BLANCHE : Good heavens ! They're just school boy and girl.

LINDA (*with faint disapproval*) : Now, I hear she's taken a new flat on her own.

BLANCHE : Yes. It's the duckiest little place. (*Laughs.*) In Chelsea. She's just at that stage.

LINDA : Um. Well, I don't suppose you did very much to dissuade her. Sometimes, Blanche . . . (*looks at BLANCHE and turns away, and shrugs*) . . . oh . . . well . . .

BLANCHE : Oh, I know it sounds odd to us, but she's quite safe there with Nanny. They all do it now. After all, she's nearly eighteen. She's loving it. She writes, and paints, and . . . and . . . does dabbly things.

LINDA : And nothing seriously, I suppose ?

BLANCHE : She's *very* clever ! She get's that from her American mother.

LINDA : I see.

BLANCHE : We were very much the same. Oh, I think it's far better for young people to be independent.

LINDA : Don't be so ridiculous ! Did you live in a flat at eighteen, with an old woman whom you could twist round your little finger ?

BLANCHE : No, dear. I had parents . . . but . . . *(she smiles—in the past)* I did other things. I remember staying out all night once . . . *(laughs)* . . . and didn't I get it in the morning.

[The door flies open and KIM comes in. He is a slight, fair boy, frank and charming. He might be anything between eighteen and twenty. He comes in flushed and excited, rather overwhelming BLANCHE with the force of his welcome. He wears a motoring coat and scarf. BLANCHE rises, excitedly, on his entrance.]

KIM : Hulloo !!! Mother, darling ! *(Rushes to her.)* Here I am !

BLANCHE : Darling !! *(Embracing him)* Lovely ! Lovely !

KIM *(excitedly)* : Home for good, this time !

BLANCHE : I was beginning to worry. You said half past six. Look who's here. *(Indicating LINDA.)*

KIM *(laughs at her)* : Hulloo, Aunt Linda. *(Crosses to her.)* How are you ? *(Kisses her, boyishly.)*

LINDA : I'm very well *(disentangles herself)*, but . . . don't be quite so overwhelming.

KIM : Sorry. *(Laughs.)* We came in like stink—where we could ! Did sixty most of the way.

BLANCHE : Villain ! What did I tell you ? Where's your friend ? Won't he come in ?

KIM : Darling, he's half across London by now. Oh . . . *(he turns to LINDA excitedly)* . . . it's just grand to be here.

LINDA : Aren't you sorry your schooldays are over ?

KIM No, I don't think so (*More seriously*) Oh you mean . . . "The happiest days of my life"? They're not *really*, you know, Aunt Linda I'm sick of bare boards and stone floors! I look at all these comfortable chairs, and carpets! No, I'm not sorry, I'm glad! Glad to be home (*he smiles at BLANCHIE exultantly*) with you!

BLANCHIE (*pleased*) You'll miss your friends

KIM Oh, I'll miss some of the blokes, but I can go and stay with them when I feel like a bit of country, and they can come and stay with me when they feel like a bit of town, can't they?

BLANCHE Of course

LINDA (*rising, and drawing on her gloves*) Well, I think I'll be going. I may ring you later, Blanche

BLANCHE . Yes, dear

[*HESTER enters with a parcel, which is the cocktail shaker and glasses*

HESTER The shaker, my lady

LINDA (*crossing to door, and taking parcel*) Thank you, Hester

[*HESTER stands in door, waiting*

Waving parcel at BLANCHIE) This is what I came for! (*To KIM, from across the room just before she goes through the door*) Now that you are home, don't be a worry to your mother. Good-bye

[*She goes out, and HESTER closes the door. KIM and BLANCHIE stand regarding each other. They laugh. KIM at LINDA'S retreating figure, BLANCHE for the sheer joy of having him home*

KIM Poor old Linda! They've us alter her not! What's she got away with this time?

BLANCHE My new cocktail shaker

KIM . What's she going to do with that? Shake up her Ovaltine?

BLANCHE : She's got some rather smart people for dinner, and she's giving them cocktails. Poor Linda ! She means well.

KIM : She's just a nosy old woman, and you *know* it.

BLANCHE : Oh, darling ! Naughty ! Are you pleased to see your mother.

KIM (*embracing her, with a terrific squeeze*) Doesn't it feel like it ?

BLANCHE : Painfully ! But I like to hear you say it. Oh, we've got such a lot to talk about !

KIM : You can come and sit on my bed.

BLANCHE (*nodding happily*) : You're looking very well.

KIM : I'm fine. You look lovely, darling, in that frock.

BLANCHE (*pleased*) : Do you like it ? Oh, I'm very well, dear. (*Suddenly, after a slight pause*) I've got a surprise for you.

KIM : Have you ? What ?

BLANCHE : Mary Lou's coming to dinner !

KIM (*briefly*) : I know.

BLANCHE : How . . . do you know ?

KIM : She told me in a letter yesterday.

BLANCHE : Oh. (*She looks at him.*) Do . . . do . . . you write to each other . . . often . . . then ?

KIM : Pretty often. (*Laughs at her.*) We've written to each other just about every day this term. We promised we would.

BLANCHE (*after a moment's pause*) : What a lot of notepaper ! (*She dismisses it, and moves to sofa*) I suppose I have to pay for all that ! (*Jokingly*)

KIM (*vaguely disappointed in her*) : Oh, mother

BLANCHE : Darling, I don't mind !

[*There is a quiet moment between them. They both sit on the sofa.*]

It's lovely having you home again, darling. Oh, so lovely ! You can have a nice holiday, and then . . . we must think . . . what we are going to . . . to . . . do with your life ! You see . . . we'll have to find some sort of . . . of . . . pigeon-hole you'll fit into, won't we ?

KIM . I don't think I want my life to have a rubber band round it, and be put in a pigeon-hole just yet I . . . (*laughs*) . . . want some fun !

[*She looks at him thoughtfully for a moment. Then suddenly :*

BLANCHE . I . . . (*she makes to get up*) . . . must go and dress for dinner

[*The door opens, and TONY comes in. BLANCHE is just about to leave the room*

TONY (*cheerfully, and more controlled*) Hullo ! So you've arrived, have you ?

KIM : Yes. Hullo.

BLANCHE (*to TONY*) You *were* naughty to Linda, dear She was so hurt.

TONY (*patting her*) . Sorry, sweetheart ! I hope you apologised nicely for me .

BLANCHE : Well . . .

TONY : But you apologise so nicely, darling.

BLANCHE : I did what I could, but . . . don't do it again, dear. It only makes things difficult.

TONY : Sorry. (*Meaning it*) I'm sorry. (*Pats her.*) Really.

BLANCHE : All right, darling (*She takes one look at his nervy, strained young face, sighs, and goes to the door.*) Your father never liked her, either. . .

[*She laughs, and goes out.*

TONY (*crossing to KIM*) : How are you ?

KIM . I'm fine It's grand to be home.

TONY : Yes. (*Slight pause*) I suppose . . . it is

[*They regard each other.*

KIM : You're . . . looking pretty ghastly. What on earth have you been doing ?

TONY : Me ? (*Carelessly*) Nothing. Why ?

KIM : Just that you look like death warmed up.

TONY (*laughs shortly*) : You're getting as bad as Linda. Thank God *she's* gone ! Told her I had to go upstairs and dress. I've been sitting up in the bathroom reading last week's *News of the World* (*Looks at his watch*) I've got to go out soon. Sorry, but I won't be here for the fattened calf. You'll have to fix that with mother for me. (*He is speaking jerkily, and under strain*) Nice to have you home again, kid. Nice to have that fresh face of yours around. I suppose . . . (*looks at him*) . . . I should envy you it !

KIM (*puzzled*) You . . . need a holiday, or something. Why don't you get out of town for a few weeks.

TONY Yes. I do. (*Realising it*) Can't just yet, though. (*Then, with some bravado*) Don't worry about me. I'm all right.

KIM But . . . but I do worry about you.

TONY (*irritated*) Well . . . don't !

[TONY crosses to drink table, and helps himself to a second whisky and soda. KIM watches him, slightly concerned.]

KIM : Tony ? (*Tony turns*) What's the matter ? You're . . . you're . . . all to pieces . . . (*Half laughing, half apprehensive*) You . . . you . . . haven't murdered anyone . . . or anything, have you ?

TONY (*with a short laugh*) : No, why ?

KIM : I don't know . . . but you're such a fool, you know. I never know what you won't do next.

TONY (*briefly*) : I shouldn't worry if I were you

[*There is a pause, and TONY looks at him.*]

Look here, Kim ! Can I talk to you ?

KIM Well, of course ! What is it ?

TONY (*almost musingly*) . After all, you *are* my only brother . One can't count David . God knows how he happened in this family ! (*Then suddenly*) How old are you, Kim ?

KIM . Eighteen, but I'm pretty old, really.

TONY . Yes (*Laughs shortly*) I know you are . You look so damned innocent . You're a good kid, Kim . I guess Aunt Linda was right . I'm not much good !

[*He is a little emotional.*]

KIM : Don't talk to me ! What's on your mind ? You can tell me

TONY (*quietly*) . You remember Helen Caistor, don't you ? A girl you drove down one night from Oxford, because I got pickled.

KIM : Yes

TONY . I don't believe I ever thanked you for that, did I ?

KIM (*worried*) That's all right

TONY (*suddenly, and with considerable emotion*) . Oh, God !

[*He gets up, and walks over to the mantel . He almost breaks down, and his shoulders shake . He turns round, very overthought.*]

KIM (*alarmed*) Tony ? Tony . . . what is the matter ? What's happened ? (*Crosses to him*) Don't, Tony . . . Don't

TONY (*gulping whiskey*) Sorry . I'll . . . be all right in a minute . . .

KIM What is it ?

TONY (*slowly, and with deliberation*) You see . . . Helen and I . . . have been living together . We're . . . (*he laughs*) . . . lovers

KIM (*relieved*) : Oh . . . (*Pause : and then tentatively*) You . . . you . . . mean you go and . . . sleep . . . there ?

TONY (*with a bitter little laugh*) : Yes. You see, we thought we couldn't find much " fun " in anyone but ourselves . . . but . . . (*Shrugs.*)

KIM (*awed*) : Does . . . does mother know anything about this ?

TONY : Of course not ! Don't be a bloody fool !

KIM (*after a pause*) : You're . . . you're taking an awful risk . . . aren't you, Tony ?

TONY : You've got to take risks if you want a thing very badly.

KIM : But . . . why are you so shattered ? It's not such a very awful thing that you've done, is it ?

TONY (*slowly and deliberately*) : We've done . . . just about everything there is to do, Kim, to . . . " get a kick out of life. . . . "

KIM (*baffled*) : Oh . . . where do you . . . ?

[TONY *finger*s his glass.

TONY : A sort of studio place. We rent it.

KIM (*lamely*) : Isn't . . . isn't . . . that very expensive ?

TONY (*casually*) : Oh, we share. We took it from some friends of hers . . . Sylvester. It's near Holland Park. (*With a sudden fierce intensity*) I *loathe* the sight of the place !

KIM (*bewildered*) : How . . . how . . . long have you been doing this ?

TONY : 'Bout three months now. But . . . but I can't go on.

KIM : You don't want to . . . get married ?

TONY (*looks at him penetratingly*) : Married ? (*Then violently*) Good God, no ! I'll *never* get married. Besides, she *is* married.

KIM : Oh.

TONY : That's not the trouble. I'm glad she is. It's a let-out. That's why I had to tell you all this to-night. Her husband gets home to-morrow. He's one of these naval blokes, and I've got to finish this to-night, for good and all. . . .

KIM (*shrewdly*) : Can . . . you do that ?

TONY : I . . . don't . . . know You see, Kim, it's all a mess. She's in love with me, and it's partly my fault. I started it. I was a fool—but I was curious, and now she won't leave me alone ! And . . . I hate her (*He is very violent*) I tell you, I hate the sight of her ! I'm sorry for her, but that doesn't help matters I've got to get right away ! Get right out of it (*More slowly*) I . . . don't believe, I can ever love any woman . . . decently. I'm not made that way. (*He drops his voice*)

KIM (*quietly*) : I see

TONY (*suddenly rounding on him*) . How can you see ? You don't know anything about it. I was a fool to have told you.

KIM (*quietly and deliberately*) : I do see . . . though, Tony.

TONY (*looking at him curiously*) : I believe you do
[*He crosses to him.*]

Kim ?

KIM : What ?

TONY (*placing his hand on his shoulder, and almost shaking him*) : You'll . . . you'll never be like that, will you ? Will you ?

KIM (*steadily*) : No.

TONY (*emotionally*) : I'm glad. I'm telling you all this . . . because . . . I mighn't get a chance to talk to you again, like this, alone. I'm . . . probably going away.

KIM : You're not *running* away, are you, Tony ?

TONY : Yes. (*A little fearfully and abnormally*) I'm

afraid, Kim. You see, I don't believe in anything. I can't. I don't believe in anything . . . afterwards.

KIM : After what ?

TONY : After death, you fool ! What happens then ?

KIM (*thoughtfully*) : I don't know . . . but . . . I feel sure something does. It must.

TONY : You're very *sure*, aren't you ? (*Laughs*) I thought that, when I'd just left school.

KIM : What *are* you driving at ?

TONY (*brushing his eyes*) : You think I'm hysterical, don't you ?

KIM (*sane*ly) : I don't think you're quite well, Tony.

TONY : I'm not. I got *myself* into this mess.

[*He laughs a little recklessly, and takes a small silver box from his pocket. He hands it to KIM.*]

Do you know what that is ?

KIM (*taking it, and looking at it uncertainly*) : No

[*KIM opens the box. It contains a white powder. It slowly dawns on him.*]

TONY (*pathetically defiant*) : We both take it. *Now* do you understand ? That's why I'm looking so bloody. I'm . . . *full* . . . of . . . it !

[*For an instant they are both helpless.*]

I told you I was rotten ! Now you know Hell ! You ought to be proud of me !

KIM : Oh, Tony.

TONY : What ?

KIM (*imploringly*) : Tony ! Tony . . . promise me you'll stop. Think of mother ! Oh, Tony . . . it's . . . it's not too late . . . yet . . . *is it* ?

TONY (*tonelessly*) : Yes, it is. You see, we . . . *like* . . . it.

KIM (*horrified, but helpless*) : But . . . how . . . long . . . ?

TONY (*confessing all emotionally*) : About three months now. Can't manage without it. I get the most frightful feeling in my legs if I don't get it. Itchy. Have you ever been to bed very tired . . . can't sleep ? Well, it's like that. Your feet give you hell. It's . . . indescribable. (*He unconsciously scratches the palms of his hands.*) I'm sorry to spring all this on you, on your first night home . . . but . . . you're the only soul I can tell. I . . . may not see you again . . . for some time . . . after to-night. (*He is talking almost to himself.*) I told you. I'm going away. I want you to look after mother for me . . . while I'm away. She must never know about this . . . so . . . so . . . I'm better . . . away, until I can pull myself together.

KIM : Where . . . are you going ?

TONY : Don't know. (*Laughing carelessly*) Somewhere. I won't come home to-night. I can't . . . like this, and it's not going to be easy . . . to-night . . . but I've got to get it over ! (*With a kind of miserable dread*) She'll only want to start it all over again. . . .

[*He looks at KIM dully. Then suddenly :*

Give me back that box !

KIM : No. (*Putting it in his pocket and holding it.*)

TONY (*authoritatively*) : Come on !

KIM : I won't !

TONY (*carelessly, and beyond caring*) : All right, have it your own way. There's plenty more where that came from.

[*KIM looks at him hopelessly. He sits down on the sofa. He is sobbing quietly.*

(*Touched*) I'm sorry, Kim, but forget about me, will you ? For God's sake don't try and be the

good little brother ! It does no good, and . . .
and . . . I can't stand it ! See !

[KIM looks up at him.

You're *young*, and I'm . . . I'm old.

KIM (*wonderingly*) : Tony . . . ? You're only . . .
twenty-four.

TONY : Yes. I'm twenty-four . . . but . . . I'm
old.

[*They look at each other. The door opens and
HESTER enters.*

HESTER : Oh, Mr. Kim, Miss Mary Lou is
here. She's gone upstairs with your mother.

KIM (*controlling himself*) : Oh. Thanks . . .
Hester. . . .

TONY (*hurriedly*) : I must go. Look here, kid, I
can't argue with mother about going out. I
must go. You see that . . . don't you ? I don't
want a fuss. Put it right for me, and say I'm
as sick as mud, not being here. You can put it
over for me.

KIM (*wearily*) : All right. If you *must* go . . .
but . . . but . . . Tony . . . please come back
here to-night. Come and talk to me when you
get back. Wouldn't it be better ?

TONY (*more cheerfully*) : We'll see. (*Pause.*) But
I must beat it now. 'Bye. . . .

[*He has gone to the door, and rapidly out. KIM
runs after him. He stands at the door to the hall.*

KIM (*calling*) : Tony ! !

[*But TONY has gone. The front door slams. KIM
stands at the door for a minute, and then closes it,
and slowly walks back to the sofa. He sits down. He
takes the little box from his pocket and looks at it.
BLANCHE enters. He hastily puts the box in his
pocket, and tries to appear more controlled.*

BLANCHE (*crossing over to desk*) : Kim, dear,
aren't you going up to wash ? Mary Lou's here.
She's just tidying. You needn't bother to change

if you don't want to. I don't think Hester has unpacked for you yet, and dinner's a little early on account of David. He doesn't like to be too late. (*She turns to look at him*) I expect you're hungry, too. Why dear? What's the matter? You're very pale, darling. Aren't you feeling well?

KIM (*recovering himself*): Yes. Yes, I'm quite all right. Bit tired, that's all.

BLANCHE: Rushing about in that car! Where's Tony?

KIM: Oh . . . he's gone out, darling.

BLANCHE: Oh, but he *can't* do that! I want you all to be here to-night.

KIM: He couldn't help it. A friend of his came down from Oxford suddenly, just for the night, so he had to go. He asked me to ask you to forgive him. It's all right, mother. I don't mind.

BLANCHE (*disappointed*): Oh . . . I *do* think he might have stayed in to-night. It's very selfish. He never told me . . . and . . . and I've got such a nice dinner. . . .

[*The door opens, and MARY LOU MALING enters. She comes in quietly and smilingly. She is small, and dark, and just eighteen, with a rather old-fashioned quality. She wears a simple but expensive evening frock. She is rather dusky and deep, this*
MARY LOU.

MARY LOU: Hullo?

KIM: Darling! (*Rushing to her*) How are you?

MARY LOU: I'm fine. . . .

[*He embraces her, and then holds her at arm's length.*

KIM: It's marvellous to see you!

MARY LOU: Oh, I say, you've grown!

KIM: So have you.

MARY LOU: We've both grown.

KIM : It's marvellous, isn't it ? . . .

[*They are about to continue chattering.*]

BLANCHE : Run and clean up, old man. You can talk your heads off afterwards.

KIM : Can't she come with me ?

BLANCHE : No, she can't. She's going to talk to me.

KIM : Righto ! (*Turns to MARY LOU.*) I won't be long. (*He goes to the door, and turns.*) No stories behind my back, now.

BLANCHE (*waving him off*) : Run along !

[*KIM goes out. BLANCHE turns to MARY LOU. She smiles approvingly at her frock.*]

(*Smiling*) You've had some correspondence, I believe. He let the cat out of the bag.

MARY LOU : Oh, what's he been saying ?

BLANCHE (*laughing*) : Nothing very terrible.

[*She looks at her quietly. There is a pause. They sit on the sofa.*]

MARY LOU : You . . . don't mind, do you ?

BLANCHE (*amused*) : Of course not ! I love you to be friends. You practically belong to me don't you ? You know . . . I often wish I'd had a girl.

MARY LOU : I bet you don't ! Boys are far easier.

BLANCHE : Well . . . I don't know about that. . . .

MARY LOU : Girls are a shocking nuisance. "Getting them off," and everything.

BLANCHE (*laughing*) : I don't think I'd want to "get them off," as you call it.

MARY LOU : Oh, yes, you would ! You wouldn't want to retire to Cromwell Road with a lot of ageing spinsters on your hands !

BLANCHE : Oh, poor spinsters ! Still, you know, I think some of them prefer it.

MARY LOU (*continuing*) : If I was your daughter, wouldn't you want me to get married ?

BLANCHE : Yes, I suppose I would, but I wouldn't like losing you. I'm quite terrified at the thought of losing Tony and Kim.

MARY LOU (*cheerfully*) : Oh, but that's different. *They'll* take themselves off !

BLANCHE : Yes, I suppose they will. (*Pause.*) Still I don't cherish the prospect of the day they do, and being all alone in this house. I don't expect they will think about that when the time comes. I'd never stand in the way of their chances to happiness. No one has any right to do that.

[MARY LOU *smiles at her.*

Tony rather worries me. He doesn't seem able to find that thing he wants so much—just yet. He's still groping. But . . . I've let him go ahead and lead his own life. I think perhaps it's best these days . . . for everyone. . . .

MARY LOU : I'm glad you feel like that. I do, too. Nanny and I had a great old argument about it yesterday. She was very irritating all day.

BLANCHE : Oh, poor Nanny. She's devoted to you.

MARY LOU : I am, to *her*, really. I expect it was because her back was bad. Joan came down and gave her a treatment. She *squeaked* a bit.

BLANCHE : It's jolly for you having Joan just above you. Nice having someone your own age.

MARY LOU : She's a lamb.

[*The door opens, and KIM returns.*

KIM : I rather feel my cars are burning.

BLANCHE : Don't be conceited ! You weren't even mentioned.

KIM (*putting his arms round MARY LOU*) : I told her about the letters. (*Laughs.*) She said, "What a lot of notepaper!" She quite forgot I'd seen bundles and bundles of letters in an old writing-case, up in the box-room, with Queen Victoria stamps on 'em. . . .

BLANCHE : What a lie !

KIM (*laughing*) : King Edward, then !

BLANCHE : Those should have been burned long ago. I'd forgotten they were there.

KIM : What about the day I found you up there, reading them all ?

BLANCHE : I was tidying up the box-room !

KIM : Yes, and mooning over some old fogey's photograph . . . in a khaki uniform and a comic hat.

BLANCHE : That was your Uncle Frank, after the Boer War ! Poor dear Linda's husband.

KIM : You mean, Linda's poor dear husband.

BLANCHE : He was very good-looking.

KIM : I see ! So you tried to cut Linda out, did you ?

BLANCHE : Don't be so silly.

MARY LOU : Can I have a cigarette ? I've only had two to-day.

BLANCHE : Good girl.

KIM (*quickly producing a packet of Players from his trouser-pocket*) : I've got some.

MARY LOU (*taking one, which he lights for her*) : Oh, thanks.

BLANCHE : Where on earth did you get those ?

KIM : At a pub !

MARY LOU : Can I have the card ?

[KIM gives her cigarette-card.]

(To BLANCHE) You don't, do you ?

BLANCHE : Isn't it funny of me ?

MARY LOU : Oh, no, I'm glad you don't.

BLANCHE (*laughing*) : Why ?

MARY LOU : It suits you !

BLANCHE : One foot in the grave ?

MARY LOU : They're a very bad habit, anyway.

BLANCHE : David and Judith will be here in a minute.

MARY LOU (*rather casually*) : Oh, really ?

BLANCHE (*getting up*) : Would you like cocktails ?

KIM : Yes. I'll mix them.

BLANCHE : You oughtn't to know how. (*Crossing to door*) No, Hester can do it. (*She hesitates.*) Oh . . . bother. . . .

KIM : What ?

BLANCHE : I've gone and lent Linda my new shaker. Isn't that like me ?

KIM : Exactly, darling. Won't the old one do ? They'll taste just the same.

BLANCHE : Oh, will they ? Yes, well, we'll have to use that. . . . Oh dear ! (*Laughs.*) I am a fool ! (*She goes off.*)

MARY LOU (*referring to BLANCHE*) : Sweet !

[*She laughs, and looks at him happily. The laughter dies on KIM's face. She looks at him.*]

KIM (*sitting down on fire stool*) : Oh . . . I'm so thankful you're here.

[*She hastily goes to him, her arms about his shoulders.*]

MARY LOU : What's the matter ?

KIM (*hesitates, undecided, and then looks at her*)
Oh, nothing.

MARY LOU (*concerned*) : Kim ?.

[*They look at each other, he reticent.*]

KIM (*quietly*) : Something rather awful happened, just before you arrived.

MARY LOU (*anxiously*) Darling ?

KIM (*hesitating*) : I don't know if I should say anything about it, even to you. I don't know what to do about it.

MARY LOU (*intuitively*) : You saw Tony ? Was that it ?

KIM (*looks at her*) : Yes. You see I haven't seen him for three months. He's in a frightful state.

MARY LOU (*quietly*) : I know.

KIM : You . . . know ?

MARY LOU : I've been watching.

KIM : But . . . why on earth didn't you tell me ?

MARY LOU : It's his business, darling. His life's his own. He wouldn't thank you for interfering. He came and saw me one day, but I couldn't get much out of him. Did . . . he talk . . . to you . . . ?

KIM : Yes. He broke down, and told me all about it. (*Becoming emotional*) Mother has no idea. It would just about kill her, I should think. . .

MARY LOU : Oh, Kim ! Tell me.

KIM : No . . . (*hesitates, unhappily*) . . . it's . . .
(*Suddenly definite*) No.

MARY LOU (*tentatively*) : It's . . . it's . . . a woman ?

KIM (*looking at her*) : Yes . . . in a way.

MARY LOU (*rather awed*) : A . . . a . . . married woman ?

KIM : Yes.

MARY LOU (*anxiously*) : What's happening ?

KIM : He said he may be going away to-night, after he'd seen her for the last time.

MARY LOU : Where did he say he was going . . . afterwards ?

KIM : He . . . didn't know. He said . . . just . . . away. Somewhere. Why? (*He looks at her.*) You don't think . . . ?

MARY LOU : What ?

KIM : That I shouldn't have let him go ?

MARY LOU : Well, you couldn't help it, if you didn't know where he was going. Is he with her now ?

KIM : Yes.

MARY LOU : Let's ring him up. Do you know where ?

KIM : No. (*On second thoughts*) Yes . . . (*Gets up*) Yes, somebody called Sylvester, near Holland Park.

MARY LOU : We'll ring him up.

[*They quickly cross the room to the telephone, and look through the books.*]

KIM : Yes.

MARY LOU (*at books*) : Yes, we will. Has Sylvester an "i" or a "y" ?

KIM : A "y," I should think. There are dozens of them.

[*HESLER enters.*]

HESLER : Mr. and Mrs. David are here, Mr. Kim.

KIM (*looking up from telephone directory*) : What ? Oh, damn, are they ? (*To MARY LOU*) I'd forgotten all about them.

MARY LOU (*comforting, but uncertain*) : I expect he's all right.

KIM : David and Judith mustn't see there is

anything wrong. We'll . . . just have to . . . keep on talking. . . .

[DAVID and JUDITH enter. DAVID is twenty-nine, dark in contrast to the other two brothers. He has a brisk sharp way of speaking, takes life seriously, and is entirely devoid of imagination. JUDITH is twenty-seven. Pretty in a fair, stocky way. She is suburban and rather smug, and wears a very orthodox evening frock. She has a slight affected lisp.

JUDITH (advancing with outstretched hand to KIM, and extravagantly) : Hello, Kim ! Home at last ! (She kisses him.) Hello, Mary Lou ! Haven't seen you for such a long time !

MARY LOU (with an effort) : No. It's ages . . . isn't it ?

JUDITH : Yes. Ages !

DAVID : Hullo, Kim ! Glad to see you back.

KIM : Hullo, David ! Thanks. (They shake hands.)

DAVID : Hullo, Mary Lou !

MARY LOU : Hullo !

DAVID (to KIM) : Well, how are you ?

KIM : Very well. (Never quite at ease with DAVID.) It's nice to see you both again.

[There is a slight deadlock in conversation. JUDITH sits on the sofa, very much at home. MARY LOU stands behind. DAVID picks up the "Evening Standard," and ignores everybody. JUDITH sits complacently arranging the folds of her skirts. She beams self-satisfaction.

MARY LOU : How . . . how . . . are the children ?

KIM : Oh, yes, how are the children ?

JUDITH : Peter's had the mumps, but he's better now.

DAVID (taking interest) : Yes. Poor little beggar. He was pretty bad. We were afraid of complications . . . but he's better now.

MARY LOU : Oh.

DAVID (*resuming his paper*) : Oh, he's all right now. We got them in time.

KIM : Oh, yes. Mother did tell me, in one of her letters. I'd forgotten.

JUDITH : Wait till you have a family of your own Kim, and then you'll remember these things. (*Pause*) David's getting a new car !

KIM (*interested*) . Oh, are you ? What sort ?

DAVID (*pompously*) Don't know yet. A small saloon of some kind

JUDITH (*quite full of herself*) I thought one of the new Rovers would be nice. I like the red wire wheels. I think they look so racy

MARY LOU . Why don't you get a sports car, if you want something racy ?

DAVID (*with decision*) : We don't want one of those things, Mary Lou. We need a family car. Something to take the kids down to the cottage in, on Sundays

KIM : Yes, I suppose it would be more useful to you.

[*Again a deadlock, relieved by BLANCHE entering.*]

BLANCHE : Oh . . . you've arrived, David. How are you, dear ? (*Kisses him*)

DAVID : Hello, mother !

BLANCHE : And Judith ? (*Kisses her*) I'm so glad you could both be here to-night.

DAVID : Haven't seen you for a fortnight, have we, mother ?

BLANCHE (*sitting*) : Is it a fortnight ? Yes, I suppose it is. I've been on a committee at the bridge club. Oh, so busy ! Trying to make some money for a good cause. I always say if people can afford to lose at bridge, they can afford to pay for doing it !

[*HESTER enters with cocktails on a tray.*]

Oh, cocktails ! Thank you, Hester. Did you put some bitters in them ?

HESTER (*handing cocktails*) : Yes, madam.

BLANCHE : That's right. (*All take one with the exception of JUDITH.*) Won't you, Judith ? Oh, you must. Just to wish Kim luck.

JUDITH : I don't think I should ! They go straight to my head

BLANCHE : Oh, these won't. They're very weak, aren't they Hester ?

HESTER : Yes, madam

JUDITH (*recklessly*) : Well, just a sip, to wish you luck, Kim.

KIM : Thanks.

[*HESLER retires. They all toast Kim's health.*]

DAVID : Here's good luck, Kim (*Chorus of "good lucks," and they all drink*) Well, now that he's left school, what are we going to make of him, mother ?

KIM (*over-flippantly*) "I just want to be a little boy, and have fun !"

DAVID : Oh, you do, do you ?

BLANCHE : Don't talk like that, dear. Everyone has to work. Life would be too dull for words. It's . . . it's all a question of equality. . . .

DAVID : What, mother ?

BLANCHE . Equality !

DAVID : Don't you want to go up to Oxford ?

KIM : Not particularly.

DAVID : Humph !

[*There is a slight strain.*]

BLANCHE : Well, we'll see. . . . Oh, David, I want to talk to you, later, about my income-tax.

DAVID : What about it ?

BLANCHE : That's what I want you to tell me. I've been having forms. Notices. The last ones were printed in *red* ! If I show them to you, after dinner, you will help me, won't you ?

DAVID (*genially*) : Of course, dear.

BLANCHE : I wish I understood these things. I don't believe they understand them themselves.

DAVID : Who ?

BLANCHE : The people.

DAVID : Oh.

[*All laugh.*]

Where's Tony to-night ?

KIM (*hastily*) . Oh, he had to go out. A friend of his turned up in town, suddenly . . . someone he wanted to see . . . so I made him push off. He asked me to tell you he was sorry to miss you.

JUDITH (*tactlessly*) : He was looking awfully ill last time I saw him. I met him one day in Regent Street. I thought he looked so funny.

BLANCHE (*with vague undercurrent of doubt*) : How do you mean, dear . . . funny ?

JUDITH (*with an inane little laugh*) : Oh, I don't know. Just . . . funny. Then he went and bought Peter the most lovely train, so I thought I must have imagined it.

BLANCHE : Oh. (*Convincing herself*) Yes, dear. You must have.

[HESTER enters.]

HESTER : Dinner is served, madam.

BLANCHE (*rising*) : Oh, thank you, Hester. I hope you're all hungry. (*To KIM*) You should be. Nothing but a sandwich for lunch, I expect. Come along.

[*They all move towards the door.*]

You go in with Judith, Kim. It's your party.

[*The telephone suddenly rings. They all pause.*]

KIM is nearest to it.

(*To KIM*) Answer it, dear.

KIM (*at telephone, after a hurried look at MARY LOU*): Hullo? Oh. . . . (*Relieved*) Hullo, Aunt Linda! Yes, she's here. . . . Just a minute. . . . I'll get her. . . . (*Holds receiver out for BLANCHE.*) Mother, it's Linda.

BLANCHE (*crossing to the phone*): Oh. . . she said she might ring. I think I know what it is. Go along in, all of you. I won't be a minute.

[*KIM, MARY LOU, and JUDITH cross the room, arm in arm, to the door. DAVID lags behind, impatiently beckoning to BLANCHE to come along. She waves him through the door, still at telephone.*]

Hullo, dear? What is it? Yes. . . yes. . . yes, dear. Well. . . I'd put them all in together, and shake them up. . . with *lots* of ice. . . What? . . . Well, dear, I'm not quite sure with sidecars. Why not both? I mean, a cherry *and* an olive.

THE CURTAIN FALLS

SCENE II

SCENE : *The same. It is ten-thirty the same evening.*

BLANCHE is seated in an armchair, JUDITH is on the sofa. Both are sewing. DAVID is seated behind, at the desk, some income-tax forms in his hand.

BLANCHE : I meant to have this finished to-night. I've been terribly slow at it.

JUDITH : It's lovely soft stuff. I love the pink one you did. She looks a poppet in it. She's got a wretched cold at present.

BLANCHE : Oh, has she ? Poor lamb. What are you doing for her ?

JUDITH : I've got some stuff, and I'm rubbing her little chest. She's awfully wheezy, though.

BLANCHE : Do be careful. Chests are horrid things.

DAVID (*looking up*) : She's all right. She's gaining weight and growing out of all her thingummies.

[*He comes forward, papers in hand.*]

I simply don't understand this, mother. I just don't understand it.

BLANCHE (*looking up*) : Oh, darling, I *did* hope you would. You're usually so clever at that sort of thing.

DAVID : I didn't mean I don't understand these forms. (*He hits them with his hand.*) Of course I understand them. What I mean is : I don't understand how you let it get like this ! You must have had a lot of notices before this one.

BLANCHE : Yes, I did, dear. Quite a lot.

DAVID (*incredulously*) : What did you do with them ?

BLANCHE : Well . . . I asked Tony. I didn't want to bother you, dear.

DAVID : And . . . what did Tony say ?

BLANCHE : He told me to throw them in the waste-paper basket.

DAVID (*petulently*) : And you did ?

BLANCHE : Well . . . I think Hester did. *He* told her to. *I* wouldn't !

DAVID (*facing her*) : Mother, there's something I've got to say to you.

BLANCHE : You're going to scold me ?

DAVID : Yes, I am.

BLANCHE (*smiling*) : Must you, dear ?

DAVID : Yes, I must ! You can't go on like this

BLANCHE : Like what ?

DAVID (*thumping the papers*) : Like this ! Like everything ! You've no grip on things, mother. Judith and I were saying so only the other day.

JUDITH (*reproachfully*) Oh, David . . .

DAVID (*to JUDITH*) Well, weren't we ? It's true, mother. You've got to take yourself in hand. This income-tax thing is just another example. Letting Tony tell you to throw them away. Letting Tony do what he likes in everything. The way you run your entire life.

BLANCHE (*placidly*) . Why, what's the matter with it ?

DAVID : You've no system. No method. You've no grip. You're . . . (*pauses for words*) . . . muddle-headed ! (*Then more kindly*) I'm sorry to say this to you, mother, but it's true. You just let things slide.

BLANCHE They've slid very comfortably for a great many years.

DAVID : Well, they won't always. You can't expect things to go smoothly *for ever* !

BLANCHE (*pauses to think*) They haven't . . . always. (*Retrospectively*) I've had . . . troubles.

DAVID (*a little un-understandingly*) : I don't seem to remember any. It seems to me you've had a pretty easy time.

BLANCHE (*thoughtfully and quietly*) : Being a widow.

DAVID (*sympathetic at once, and meaning it*) : I'm sorry, mother. (*He touches her shoulder*)

BLANCHE (*with a change of mood*) : You're quite right, David. I know I'm silly sometimes. I do let things take care of themselves . . . but . . . (*cheerfully*) . . . they do *seem* to. Still, now that

¹ Kim's home, I *will* try . . . and . . . and . . . you will do those forms for me, darling, won't you?

DAVID : I'll take them home with me.

[He collects them, and puts them in his pocket. He looks at his watch.]

I say, it's half past ten, mother. We must be going.

BLANCHE : Oh, must you? *(She gets up.)*

DAVID *(to them both)* : By the time we get over to Regent's Park and put the car away, it will be pretty late.

[JUDITH pauses in her work, reluctant to go.]

BLANCHE : But I haven't seen half enough of you yet. Tony may be in soon. He'd so love to see you.

DAVID : Well . . . half an hour . . .

BLANCHE : That's right.

[BLANCHE crosses and sits on sofa next to JUDITH.]

She resumes her sewing. DAVID comes round back of sofa, and perches on back, behind BLANCHE.

DAVID : What are those two youngsters doing?

BLANCHE : Kim's showing her his school treasures— all his pots, and trophies, and things. . . .

DAVID : Oh.

JUDITH : Mary Lou's very sweet, isn't she? She's so sort of . . . unspoiled . . . and . . . and . . . *ingénue* ! *(Pleased with herself.)*

DAVID : Well, I hope she remains so.

[KIM and MARY LOU enter. MARY LOU sits in the large armchair. KIM sits on the arm.]

DAVID *(as they come into the room)* : Oh, hullo ! So you've decided to join the Old People, at last !

KIM : Yes. Did you mind ? We've been helping Hester unpack for me. There's a lot of stuff I

sha'n't need any more. (*To BLANCHE*) Can it go in the box-room, mother?

BLANCHE : Yes, dear. Of course.

KIM : Did David tell you he's getting a new car, mother?

BLANCHE : But . . . oh . . . are you, David? How splendid, dear! What sort are you getting?

DAVID : Haven't quite decided yet.

JUDITH (*again brightly*) : I like the new Rovers I think they look so nice!

BLANCHE : Are they good? Mrs. Struthers has a lovely little car. It goes so well. I'm so silly about cars. I never know one from the other.

KIM : Hers is a Riley, mother.

BLANCHE : A Riley? Oh, is that it? It has lovely red cushions.

MARY LOU (*laughing*) : Doesn't the red all come off on your seats if they get wet?

BLANCHE : Oh, I'm quite sure it doesn't!

DAVID : Well, we can't run to that. We're not in the Riley class yet!

JUDITH : I think it's so silly for people to live beyond their means.

KIM (*just to oppose*) : Oh, I don't know. Most people seem to these days. It must be rather exciting, you know, wondering if you can get another overdraft on the piano!

DAVID : Don't get those ideas into your head, young man. Always pay cash. It saves a lot of trouble.

MARY LOU : That's all right if you don't want the money for something else. The people in the next flat to me were amazing. They used to have the most enormous parties, and got the most priceless people there—authors and film stars, and people like that. They were the greatest fun!

JUDITH : They're rather a queer lot, though, aren't they ? I mean, those sort of people usually are. (*Then hopefully*) Do you know any film stars ?

MARY LOU (*carelessly*) : Yes. A few.

KIM : Do you mean the Pringles ? Where we went that night ?

MARY LOU : Yes. They've moved now. They had to.

KIM (*with enthusiasm*) : *She* was marvellous ! Do you remember, we did a tango together ? And then staged a passionate love scene. *I* was a great success !

BLANCHE : Kim, dear, who are these people, and when did you go there ?

KIM (*airily*) : Oh, you wouldn't know them. They were friends of Tony. They had no money at all.

DAVID : No. And never would have any, I should say.

BLANCHE : But they must have had *some* money, dear.

KIM : They hadn't.

[*There is a pause.*]

DAVID : Tony ought to get a job, mother. It's ridiculous, sponging on you all the time like this.

BLANCHE : Oh, he doesn't do that, David. He has his own money like you all have.

DAVID : Yes ; and how far does it go ? Living the way he does. You're always helping him out.

BLANCHE (*cheerfully*) : Well, not very often, dear. I'd do the same for any of you.

KIM (*getting up, and suddenly emotional*) : Oh, I say ! For God's sake don't go on discussing

poor old Tony when he's not here. I think it's beastly. You did nothing else all through dinner.

BLANCHE : Kim's right, David.

DAVID : You'd forgive anyone anything, mother.

BLANCHE : Oh, Tony's all right. He's nervy and restless, but he can't help that. He always was. Remember when you were children. I don't know that it is altogether his fault.

MARY LOU : Why ?

BLANCHE (*convincing herself*) : Well, I don't know . . . but I always feel that wretched shock I had just before he was born had a lot to do with it . . . You . . . remember . . . (*to DAVID*).

JUDITH : I'm sure sudden shocks like that can affect the child.

BLANCHE : Well, they always say so, and Tony didn't have a very good start.

JUDITH : I think there's quite a lot in that sort of thing.

KIM (*with a sudden outburst of irritation*) : I *will* would !

[*There is a pause, and they all look at him, amazed. He is curiously defiant and tense.*]

BLANCHE (*reproachfully*) : Kim ?

DAVID (*pompously*) : Kindly refrain from speaking to Judith like that.

KIM (*glaring at him momentarily, and then resuming a normality*) : I'm sorry, mother . . . but . . . I wish you'd all leave Tony *alone* !

[*BLANCHE is worried. The others, with the exception of MARY LOU, are mystified at this outburst.*]

BLANCHE : Kim, darling . . . please . . . your first night home . . .

KIM (*contrite*) : Sorry, Judith.

JUDITH (*pleasantly*) : That's all right, Kim.

[HESTER enters with the port and whisky.

BLANCHE (*brightly*) : How's the garden, David ?
Just put them over there, Hester. Help your-
selves David ?

DAVID Thanks.

[*He proceeds to pour drinks. At this moment there is a loud ringing of the front-door bell. They all pause.*

BLANCHE . Was that the front door, Hester ?

HESTER : Yes, madam, it was.

BLANCHE (*speculatively*) : Now, who can that be
at this time of night ? (*Satisfied*) Tony, I expect.
Forgotten his key. Go and let him in, Hester.
She continues sewing.)

HESTER : Yes, madam.

BLANCHE (*happily*) : That's nice. You *will* see
him !

[DAVID is busy with the drinks. The bell rings
again, loud and long.

DAVID Impatient young devil !

[*Muffled voice is heard off.*

BLANCHE (*listening, and vaguely puzzled*) That's
not Tony. That's not his voice (*Convincing her-
self*) Someone come to the wrong house, I
expect.

DAVID . Some port, Judith ?

JUDITH : No, thank you

DAVID Barley water, Mary Lou ?

MARY LOU : Yes, please.

[DAVID pours barley water, and is about to hand
it to MARY LOU when HESTER returns. She looks
startled.

BLANCHE (*looking at her*) : Who is it, Hester ?

HESTER : It's . . . the police, madam !

MP

BLANCHE : The *police*? (*Looks at DAVID.*) What ever for? Didn't you leave the lights on the car, David?

DAVID : Yes, of course.

[KIM and MARY LOU move together. JUDITH looks apprehensive. BLANCHE remains calm.]

BLANCHE : What do they want, Hester?

HESTER (*flurried*) : He wouldn't say, madam. Asked if you lived here, and I said, "Yes," and then he said he must see *you*.

BLANCHE : Me? (*Again to DAVID*) David . . . what can it be? (*She looks from one to the other.*) Ask him to come in here, Hester.

HESTER : Yes, madam.

BLANCHE : That's odd?

[HESTER goes out. The family remain waiting. HESTER immediately shows in a SERGEANT OF POLICE. He is in plain clothes.]

POLICE SERGEANT : Mrs. Oldham? (*To BLANCHE, who stands up.*)

BLANCHE (*steadily*) : Yes. I am Mrs. Oldham.

POLICE SERGEANT : I'm extremely sorry to have to come and disturb you, Mrs. Oldham, but I am from Scotland Yard. You . . . must forgive this intrusion, but . . . I have some very serious news for you. . . .

BLANCHE (*alarmed*) : What is the matter?

POLICE SERGEANT : Does . . . Mr. Anton Oldham live here?

BLANCHE : Yes. He's my son—Tony. . . .

POLICE SERGEANT : Could . . . could . . . I see you alone?

BLANCHE : Can't . . . you tell me here?

POLICE SERGEANT (*looking from one to the other*) : Are you . . . all of the family?

VID : Yes, yes, go on. What is it ?

LICE SERGEANT (*to* BLANCHE) : And . . . you
Mrs. Henry Oldham ?

ANCHE · Yes . . . Oh, yes ! What has hap-
pened ? Has there been an accident ?

VID · Hurry up ! What has happened ?

JUDITH *stands up, dropping her sewing.*

LICE SERGEANT You must prepare yourself
a shock, Mrs. Oldham. I'm very sorry to be
a bearer of this news . . . but . . . there has
been . . . an accident. Your son has been . . .
violently . . . hurt . . .

ANCHE · He's . . . ?

[*They all look at each other. BLANCHE droops sud-
denly. She slowly sits down in the armchair, gazing
straight in front of her. KIM instinctively touches
her shoulder, his eyes on the POLICE SERGEANT'S
face.*

KIM (*gently*) Steady, darling . . . perhaps . . .
there's been a mistake . . .

[*The POLICE SERGEANT nods a gentle negation.
BLANCHE does not see this.*

ANCHE (*tonelessly*) No. There's . . . no . . .
mistake. . . .

[*She remains gazing in front of her.*

LICE SERGEANT I'm afraid not. Your son
and a young woman . . . a Mrs. Caistor . . .
have both been found shot in a flat in Holland
Park. It happened about an hour ago.

[*The family are appalled. BLANCHE suddenly
makes a terrific effort at control. She gets up.*

ANCHE : Where is he ? My Tony ? Where is
he ? I must go to him. . . .

[*MARY LOU and KIM go to her, either side.*

KIM (*gently*) : Better not, mother.

BLANCHE (*reasoningly*) : But . . . of course I must
(*She looks at them dazedly.*) Of course I must. I
can stand it. I'm all right.

[*Then to HESTER, who has remained standing by
the door.*

Hester, get a taxi. . . .

DAVID : It's all right. I have a car.

POLICE SERGLANT : You can come in our car,
ma'am.

BLANCHE (*faintly*) : Thank you. I will.

KIM (*on her one side*) : Steady, darling . . . we're
. . . all here. . . .

MARY LOU (*on her other side*) : Yes, darling . . .
we're all here. . . .

BLANCHE (*more controlled now*) : I don't want .
anyone . . . else . . . to . . . come. (*She turns to
DAVID and JUDITH, who are standing by the sofa,
DAVID holding JUDITH's hand.*) David . . . will
you take Judith . . . home?

DAVID : Would you rather we did?

BLANCHE (*looking front again*) : Yes. I'd rather.

DAVID : I'll come back, mother.

BLANCHE : Thank you, dear. (*Then to KIM and
MARY LOU, a hand on each of them*) You two
stay here, and . . . wait . . . for me.

[*She pats them, attempts a fleeting smile, turns
and walks out of the door. Her head is high.*

(*As she goes*) I want to go alone.

[*She goes out. KIM and MARY LOU stand quite
still looking at each other in misery. DAVID crosses
to door, and pats KIM's shoulder as he passes.*

DAVID (*quietly*) : Good night, Kim.

[*He goes out through door. JUDITH has risen from
sofa, and, with her sewing in hand, silently crosses.*

and follows DAVID out. The children remain alone. KIM suddenly collapses in the armchair, sobbing bitterly. MARY LOU quickly bends to comfort him.

MARY LOU : Oh, Kim . . . don't, darling . . . don't . . .

KIM (*clutching her*) : Oh, Mary Lou . . . but we didn't DO anything !

MARY LOU (*miserable, but trying to comfort*) : But, darling, we couldn't. . . .

KIM : We . . . didn't . . . DO . . . a . . . THING !

[She takes him in her arms, and holds him close. He clings desperately.]

Oh, Mary Lou . . .

[He is sobbing miserably as

CURTAIN FALLS

ACT II

SCENE I

SCENE *The sitting-room of MARY LOU's flat in Chelsea. It is August, four months later. The time is about seven p m*

It is a gay little room, originally old, but modernised with apple-green walls and bright curtains, painted furniture, etc. There is a small alcove back L, with a window overlooking the street. There is a window seat, and a small dining-table placed in front of it. The furnishings are for the most part modern, and the general effect is perhaps a little on the "arty" side, but the room is cheerful and intimate, and contains many little things reminiscent of MARY LOU's childhood. Two rather old and battered dolls (old wooden, and a Dutch) are propped amongst the cushions of a small sofa placed against the L. wall. Above this are little bookshelves crammed with gay little books ranging from nursery rhymes to volumes of Aldous Huxley. A door L leads to the hall and kitchenette, and a door back R to MARY LOU's bedroom. This is covered by a curtain. A small electric fire is let into the R wall, and two upholstered wooden hobs are on either side. A large armchair is placed diagonally to the fireplace.

When the curtain rises, NANNY, a kindly, humorous woman of fifty, is standing at the window back L. She is dressed as if to go out, and wears a hat. She peers through the window and down into the street. The door L opens, and JOAN TREVOR enters. She is a pretty girl of twenty, with a soft gracious quality, tempered with a clear vitality. She wears a simple, but well-cut coat and skirt, and a small hat. She carries an attaché-case and some parcels. She opens the door, and hesitates, and does not at first see NANNY, who is at the window.

JOAN *Hullo! Is anyone at home?*

NANNY *(turning)* Yes, I am.

JOAN (*coming into the room*) : Oh, hullo, Nanny. Where's Mary Lou ?

NANNY : She's not in yet, Miss Joan. I've been waiting and waiting for her to come in, and . . . I'm *waiting* ! Look at the time ! I've had my supper, and I was just getting hers . . . and I want to get away, myself.

JOAN (*putting down her case and parcels*) : I don't expect she'll be long. I was just on my way upstairs.

NANNY : I went up this morning and ran the Hoover around for you. It needed it. You don't get much time, going off to work early like you do.

JOAN : Oh, bless you.

NANNY : It needs more than the top-dusting you give it, Miss Joan, with all the nice pieces you've got up there.

JOAN (*lights a cigarette*) : They were mother's. It's about all I have got !

NANNY : Rubbish ! You've got health. That's the main thing, believe me !

JOAN (*laughing*) : Where are you off to ?

NANNY : Just going out with my sister. The one that lives in Cadogan Gardens. She's with a family there. Been with them for years. My other sister, the married one, lives at St. Albans.

JOAN : I know. Going off on a bust together ?

NANNY (*with satisfaction*) : Going to the Hippodrome. We've got seats.

JOAN : You *are* grand !

NANNY : Well, we don't often go, and when we do, we like to go in comfort and get a good view. I wonder what can be keeping her ?

JOAN : I expect she looked in at Mrs. Oldham's.

NANNY : I expect she has. Anyway, she'd have phoned me if she'd been staying.

JOAN (*thoughtfully*) : Mrs. Oldham's pretty wonderful, I think, the way she has . . . recovered.

NANNY : She is that. Oh, it was dreadful, you know, Miss Joan. I've kept all the newspapers. They sort of fascinate me. I look at them sometimes. I never can believe that that really is Mr. Tony. Oh, well . . . Miss Mary was very worried about Mr. Kim, you know. (*More cheerfully*) They're a pair, aren't they ?

JOAN : It's rather grand, isn't it Nanny, for two people as young as Mary Lou and Kim to be so completely happy and sure of themselves

NANNY : Oh, I'm very fond of Mr. Kim, but I wish he wouldn't keep Miss Mary out half the night, dancing, the way he does. She doesn't get half enough sleep. (*The door-bell rings three times.*) That's her. She always pushes the bell downstairs three times, just to let me know. (*Crossing*) I'll get her supper. Would you like something ?

JOAN : No, thanks, Nanny. I had tea, and I'm dining out.

NANNY : Oh. Are you !

[*She goes off.*]

JOAN *idles by the fireplace.* MARY LOU *bursts into the room, flushed and happy-looking.*

MARY LOU (*through half-open door*) : I'm back, Nanny.

NANNY (*off*) : I heard you.

MARY LOU (*to JOAN*) : Hullo, darling. (*She removes her hat.*) How long have you been here ?

JOAN : Not long. I've been talking to Nanny.

MARY LOU : Had a hard day ?

JOAN : Not so good.

MARY LOU : Poor sweet !

[NANNY *enters with dishes for table. She stands adjusting things on the table.*]

(*Turning*) Don't hurry, Nanny. Kim's coming over here to have supper with me. We're probably going to a picture. What have we got?

NANNY : I thought he would. I've laid for him. There's enough for the two of you. I've made you a mayonnaise out of what was left of the cold chicken

MARY LOU : Sounds lovely !

NANNY : And I've snacked you up a raspberry fool

MARY LOU (*to JOAN*) I've been to a cocktail-party. Have some sherry ? It'll buck you up.

JOAN : Love some. I am a bit tired. I rather feel to-day that I might be going right through life in a hospital uniform. It's been one of those days.

MARY LOU (*sympathetically*) . I know.

JOAN (*laughing*) : I expect in ten years' time I shall be doing exactly the same thing.

MARY LOU (*to NANNY*) . Give her the sherry, quick !

NANNY (*pouring sherry, and handing it to MARY LOU, who hands it to JOAN*) . You make me laugh, you do. You'll be married long before then.

JOAN (*taking sherry*) : Thanks.

NANNY : Have a cracknel (*Hands her biscuits.*)

JOAN (*taking biscuit, and to MARY LOU*) Aren't you having any ?

MARY LOU : No. I'll wait for Kim. *You* have some, Nanny.

NANNY : Me ? With my lumbago !

JOAN : How is it ?

NANNY (*chattily*) : It's better to-day, thank you, Miss Joan, or I wouldn't be going out.

MARY LOU (*contrite*) : Darling ! I completely

forgot. Oh, and you've been waiting. Run and get ready. . . .

NANNY (*not hurrying*) : Well, I wasn't going till you were back. There's plenty of time. We've booked ! (*To JOAN*) That rub you gave me did me a power of good.

JOAN (*sipping sherry*) : I'll do it again, if you like.

NANNY : Not just now . . . still . . . it was nice of you. . . .

JOAN : Nonsense ! It's my job. Rubbing people (*Crosses to attaché-case, where she kneels on floor and opens it.*) Look what I've got here. *That's . . . (holding it up) . . . a vibrator !*

NANNY (*coming forward, curious*) : A . . . what ?

MARY LOU : A vibrator, darling. It vibrates. She's brought it home to try it on *you* !

NANNY : Oh, has she ? Well, not to-night !

MARY LOU : That'll take the kinks out of you.

NANNY : It'd need the Hoover to do that to me ! You must find it hard work, Miss Joan, doing that all day, to all shapes and sizes. Tell me . . . (*dubiously*) . . . do you have to do men, at that hospital, too ?

MARY LOU : Of course she does.

NANNY (*moving to door*) : Seems funny to think of her doing that all day, doesn't it, and then blowing in here, just as if she had a nice respectable job in an office ? (*She leaves.*)

MARY LOU (*to JOAN*) : *You* ought to go to bed early.

JOAN : I'm going out.

[*JOAN sits on the floor at MARY LOU's feet.*]

MARY LOU (*pleased*) : Where ?

JOAN : I'm being "took" to the Café de Paris

MARY LOU (*bubbling*) : Who are you going with ?

JOAN (*amused at her enthusiasm*) : The anæsthetist from the hospital.

MARY LOU (*doubtfully*) : Really ?

JOAN : Yes, really.

MARY LOU : Don't let him do it to you !

JOAN : He's quite safe.

MARY LOU : You'll have to wear your new frock. What time will you have to go ?

JOAN : He's calling for me. (*Stretching*) I must go and have my bath.

MARY LOU : Oh, stay here a minute. I want to tell you about Kim.

JOAN : How is he ?

MARY LOU : He's fine. He's job hunting. It's settled about his being an architect. David's making a bit of a fuss, but his mother's on his side, so it's all right. I think Uncle Dick can help him. He knows lots of people.

JOAN : Oh, splendid. That's grand. (*She relaxes, sitting on the floor at MARY LOU's feet.*) It's nice here. Damn going out !

MARY LOU : Don't be silly.

JOAN (*after a quiet little pause of understanding*) : I was rather upset to-day. That child died.

MARY LOU (*all sympathy*) : Oh, Joan ! The little paralysed one ?

[JOAN *nods*.

Were you with it ?

JOAN : Yes. I'd been giving him treatments.

MARY LOU (*suddenly*) : Of course, I don't know how you can work there at all. If that happened to me . . . well . . . I mean . . . I couldn't, that's all. . . .

JOAN (*cheerfully*) : Well, you don't have to !

MARY LOU : It will do you good to go out.

JOAN : Yes. I suppose so. After all, it won't help little Tommy Robinson, my staying at home.

[JOAN laughs, and the bell rings twice. MARY LOU jumps up. JOAN follows.]

There he is ! I must go. Good heavens ! Look at the time !

MARY LOU : Wait and see Kim.

JOAN (*collecting her things*) : No, I'd better go.

MARY LOU : Don't be silly. He adores you.

[*She goes hastily into the bedroom to adjust her hair, and to return immediately.*]

JOAN (*snapping attaché-case*) : All the same, I must.

MARY LOU (*coming to bedroom door*) : Come in on the way down, and show me your frock. I haven't seen it on.

JOAN : All right.

[*The door opens and KIM comes in. He is quite cheerful.*]

KIM : Hullo !

MARY LOU : Hullo !

KIM : I've brought someone to see you. She's been taking it easy on the stairs.

MARY LOU : Who ?

[BLANCHE appears in the doorway. She is wearing street clothes, and carrying some parcels. She is not in mourning.]

BLANCHE : It's me !

MARY LOU (*pleased, and crossing to her*) : Oh, darling ! How lovely of you to come and see me.

BLANCHE : I was just on my way home. I know it's late, but he insisted. We've been shopping. (*Kisses her, and comes into the room.*)

MARY LOU (*gaily*) : I'm so glad you did.

BIANCHE : Hullo, Joan ! How are you, dear ?
Sull busy with all your cases ? I've had rheumatism I think you'd better come and do something to me. Still . . . (*laughs*) . . . I expect it's just old age !

JOAN : I've cured Nanny.

BIANCHE : So I've heard (*She turns and examines the table laid with its small meal.*)

MARY LOU (*spontaneously*) : Can't you stay and have a meal with us ? We've got chicken mayonnaise.

BIANCHE (*examining the dishes on table*) : Oh . . . and I love it ! But . . . I can't to-night, dear. I'm going out. (*Slight pause*) I am. Really ! (*Smiles a little sadly.*) I've started going about a bit . . . again . . . now . . .

MARY LOU (*meaning it*) : I'm glad.

BIANCHE (*sitting*) : Miss Struthers is calling for me, and I'm going round there. We've got a "four."

KIM : Just an old gambler, aren't you ?

[*They all laugh.*]

JOAN (*hurriedly*) : I must go and dress (*Slight pause.*) Mary Lou . . . could you possibly lend me a pair of stockings ? My evening pair's gone pop.

MARY LOU : Yes, of course.

[*She runs off into bedroom.*]

KIM (*to JOAN*) : I thought you girls didn't wear stockings these days ?

JOAN : Oh, this one does. It's far too cold. Besides, I'm old-fashioned.

KIM : What lot !

[*MARY LOU returns with a pair of stockings in each hand. She holds them out.*]

MARY LOU : Will either of these do ?

JOAN : Oh . . . (*takes a pair*) . . . those'll be lovely.
Thank you so much, darling. . . .

KIM : Where are you going ?

MARY LOU : She's going out, and she's tired and dirty, and she's going to have a bath !

KIM : Are you, Joanie ? What fun ! Can I come and watch ? I promise not to sing " God Save the King."

JOAN (*at door, and laughing*) : No, you can't !
And . . . I must hurry. (*To BLANCHE*) Good-bye

BLANCHE (*suddenly waving a parcel she is carrying*) :
Oh . . . Joan . . . some bath salts I got in Harrods
Have them, dear, and put them in your bath
They'll . . . they'll . . . make you smell nice !

MARY LOU (*laughing*) : Counteract the anæsthetics !

JOAN (*to BLANCHE*) : That's sweet of you . . .
(*they pass the parcel to JOAN*) . . . but don't you want them ?

BLANCHE (*dismissing it*) : No . . . I just bought them . . . because . . . well, because . . . I just saw them . . . and it's such a pretty bottle
Have them.

JOAN : Oh, thank you so much. I *must* fly !

[*She goes out gaily.*]

MARY LOU (*calling at door*) : Come in on your way down !

JOAN (*off*) : O.K.

[*MARY LOU closes the door.*]

BLANCHE : Nice for you having her here. It just makes all the difference. Where's Nanny ?

MARY LOU : She's going out with her sister. She's just getting ready.

BLANCHE (*smiling*) : The . . . one that lives in Cadogan Gardens ?

MARY LOU (*laughs*) : Yes. (To BLANCHE) Like a glass of sherry?

BLANCHE : Do you know, dear, I think I rather would.

MARY LOU (*gaily*) : We'll *all* have some !

[*She goes to table and pours out a glass of sherry. KIM assists her.*

At table, and as someone very young) I've been to a cocktail-party, but I only had orange-juice.

KIM (*helping himself*) · Nice one?

MARY LOU (*pouring herself a glass of sherry*) : Filthy !

KIM : Not . . . " *filthy pictures* " ?

MARY LOU (*laughing*) · No ! It was an exhibition of photographs. Camera studies. Portraits. Everyone was so busy recognising themselves . . .

BLANCHE : Mary Lou, it's time *you* had a photograph taken. I want a nice one.

KIM : She shall.

[KIM hands BLANCHE her sherry.

BLANCHE : Thank you, dear. Well . . . here's . . . (*a little pause*) . . . good luck !

KIM (*quietly*) · Yes.

[*They all sip their sherry. NANNY enters. She is in hat and coat.*

NANNY : Oh, how do you do, madam? I thought I heard your voice.

BLANCHE : Yes. It's me. How are you, Nanny?

NANNY : I'm very well, thank you, madam. A bit of lumbago now and again, but on the whole I'm keeping pretty well.

BLANCHE : That's right. The flat looks so pretty. (*She looks about.*) That's a new lamp, isn't it? (*A very modern "disc" lamp.*)

NANNY (*drawing on her gloves*) : Did you ever see such a thing !

BLANCHE : It does look a bit like a loud-speaker !

NANNY (*indicating MARY LOU*) : She'll be the death of me yet. All her new-fangled notions. I hope you'll excuse me rushing off, madam, but I'm going to the theatre. (*To MARY LOU*) Everything's ready for you. The coffee's in the percolator.

BLANCHE : What are you going to see ?

NANNY (*with satisfaction*) : The Hippodrome ! Something my sister picked out. I always leave it to her. She follows the theatres. You'll excuse me, won't you ?

[BLANCHE *nods*.

MARY LOU : Off you go !

NANNY (*a little excited*) : Good-bye !

BLANCHE : Good-bye, Nanny.

[NANNY *bustles out to the hall. The door remains open. She is collecting her things. The telephone rings.*

MARY LOU (*crosses to telephone*) : Hullo ? Yes. Yes, it is. Who ? Oh . . . yes . . . yes ; you nearly missed her. Hang on. She's here. (*Calls quickly*) Nanny ! !

NANNY (*surprised, and coming back into door*) : For me ?

MARY LOU : Yes. I think it's your sister.

NANNY : Oh, what's she want ? (*Comes in to telephone.*) Hullo ? Oh, hullo, May. I was just leaving. (*Pause.*) Cyril is ? (*Surprised.*) Is his boat home ? Oh, fancy ! Edie'll be pleased Off her head, I expect. Um ! Seems only yesterday he went away. Is he ? Oh, bless his heart Oh, go on, May . . . he didn't. (*A shade coyly*) Oh, he shouldn't go spending his money on me ! When can I see him ?

[*A rather lengthy explanation, and much nodding on the part of NANNY.*

Oh . . . I don't know if I could do that, May. I've got to be here. Yes . . . I know . . . but . . . well . . .

MARY LOU : What is it, Nanny ?

NANNY (*into phone*) : Hang on a minute, will you, May ? (*To MARY LOU*) It's my married sister's boy. You know, Cyril. His ship got home from Australia to-day, and they want me to go out there after the theatre.

MARY LOU : Well, of course, Nanny ! Go !

NANNY : Right out to St. Albans ! How could I get back ?

MARY LOU : Don't come back, you silly old thing. Stay the night. I'll be quite all right.

BLANCHIE : You can come over to us for the night, dear. Your room's always there. Of course you must go, Nanny.

NANNY (*satisfied*) : I'd like to, madam. Sort of family party, you see. He's my favourite nephew.

MARY LOU (*uaving her to the telephone*) : Say you can come !

NANNY (*to MARY LOU*) : Tell you what, you take a long lie in, and I'll be back to get you your breakfast. (*She returns to the telephone, a little excited.*) Are you there, May ? All right, I can come. I'll have to get an early train back in the morning. Well . . . that's all right. We'd better hurry. Good-bye, for now. I'll meet you in Leicester Square, soon after eight. Usual place. Ta-ta.

[*She hangs up, and bustles off.*

MARY LOU (*crossing over to BLANCHE*) : Heavens ! What a fuss ! (*Then, with the slightest trace of a "Southern accent"*) She's a terrible responsibility.

BLANCHE (*suddenly arrested by the accent, and looking at her*) : You said that *exactly* like your mother.

MARY LOU (*unself-consciously*) : Did I ?

BLANCHE : She had the prettiest voice—like all the people who come from “the South.” . . .

MARY LOU : It’s funny, isn’t it ? I’ve never even been there. I’m a half-breed, really . . . (*laughs*) . . . aren’t I ?

BLANCHE (*smiling a little sadly*) : Before you were born, she used to come and stay with me. She always wanted to steal Tony, and take him back with her to Virginia. He was such a dear little boy . . . (*quietly*) . . . but . . . (*brightens*) . . . then you came along !

KIM : Lucky for me !

BLANCHE : Lucky for all of us !

[NANNY returns endeavouring to shut an old-fashioned clasp-bag and clutching umbrella.]

NANNY : Well, I’m off.

MARY LOU : You’d better hurry, or you’ll never get to your “usual place” in time.

NANNY (*fussed*) : Well . . . I’m being as quick as I can.

MARY LOU : Got your money ?

NANNY : Yes. (*Pauses.*) Now . . . *have* I got everything ?

MARY LOU : Sure ?

[NANNY *nods, decided.*]

You’d better let me blow you to a taxi.

NANNY (*independently*) : No, I’ll go in a tube. It’s quicker.

BLANCHE : I must go (*She gets up.*) I’m having a taxi, Nanny. I’ll drop you in Sloane Square.

MARY LOU : There ! That’ll be lovely for you.

NANNY : Oh . . . (*beams*) . . . thank you, madam, very much.

BLANCHE : Come along, then. (*Turns to MARY LOU.*) Good-bye, Mary Lou dear. Please yourself about to-night.

MARY LOU : Good-bye, Nanny dear. Have a nice time.

NANNY : Good-bye, dearie.

KIM (*to BLANCHE*) : 'Bye. (*Kisses her*) I'll let you out. . . .

BLANCHE : No, we can look after ourselves.

KIM : Sure ?

BLANCHE : Of course. . . .

[*BLANCHE goes out with NANNY to landing.*]

MARY LOU (*to NANNY, as she goes through the door*) : Give my love to Cyril. He always insisted I was half Indian. Look after yourself . . . Nanny. . . .

NANNY : I'm not going to the North Pole.

KIM : Only St. Albans !

[*They go out, laughing.*]

KIM *closes the door.* MARY LOU *crosses the room.*

KIM *regards her.*

She's pretty wonderful, isn't she ?

MARY LOU : Yes, I'm glad you brought her in. She can talk about *him* . . . now.

KIM (*draws her on to his knee*) : Yes. We were alone together last night, and she said—you know, in that deliberate way of hers—"I'm getting used to there just being us two . . . here . . . alone."

MARY LOU : Poor sweet !

[*Pause, and a quiet moment. KIM puts his arms around her.*]

KIM : Darling ?

MARY LOU : What ?

KIM : You haven't kissed me yet.

MARY LOU : I have !

KIM : I didn't notice it !

[*They kiss, and laugh.*]

MARY LOU (*gaily*) : What have you been doing since lunch-time ?

KIM (*settling back, and pulling her back*) : Well . . . I went to two architects' offices . . . before I met mother. . . . They were no good. Awful ! . . . But I just wanted to see what they were like. At *both* places they gave me tea the spoons stood up in, and I washed it down with wet ginger-nuts ! *That* decided me. I don't think I care about E.C.2 !

MARY LOU : Much better to wait till Uncle Dick can help you.

KIM : Yes, I know, but it's just as well to look about. Think how pleased *David* will be !

MARY LOU (*after a moment's thought*) : How on earth did your mother ever produce David ?

KIM : Mother hadn't had much practice then. She got better as she went along.

[*They laugh together. MARY LOU's mood changes. She becomes reflective.*]

MARY LOU : I'm so glad she's started going about again and seeing people. She's making herself do it, you know. She's awfully sure, really. That vagueness is only a defence.

KIM (*quietly*) : Funny, her saying that . . . just now . . . about Tony. Funny, isn't it, that we can be so happy . . . when we know he isn't here . . . and never can be ? . . . If he was, he'd be glad about us.

[*There is a pause.*]

MARY LOU (*thoughtfully*) : Everything . . . even the worst things . . . get faint . . . in time.

You know . . . sometimes, I forget all about him . . . that there ever was anyone called Tony. . . .

KIM : Yes. (*Slight pause.*) I do, too. It's . . . rather awful.

MARY LOU : To think of things . . . getting forgotten? Kim, if you died, would I forget you?

KIM : I don't know, darling.

MARY LOU (*quietly deliberating*) : I don't . . . think . . . I would

KIM (*laughing*) : Well, I've no intention of dying.

MARY LOU (*brightly*) : Nor have I.

KIM : We shall both of us live to be ninety, and very objectionable, with *all* our faculties.

MARY LOU . Can you imagine that? Us, I mean. Being old. At ninety. We shall be boring each other frightfully by then. . . . I don't think we will. (*Then, with bright definiteness*) No!

KIM : After all, there always *has* been us. I mean, it's like eggs and bacon for breakfast. You have them every day, but you don't get bored with them

MARY LOU (*doubtfully*) : No . . . but you don't *love* them.

KIM : I do. (*He kisses her cheek lightly, and they both laugh*)

MARY LOU . Does your mother know we feel like this?

KIM : I think so . . . really. I think she'd like us to get married. Later on.

MARY LOU (*with complete decision*) : Well, we will.

[*He kisses her affectionately, and they break away. There is a slight pause, and the door suddenly opens and JOAN enters. MARY LOU jumps up.*

JOAN : I'm just going!

MARY LOU : Come on in, and let's have a look at you !

KIM (*admiringly*) : Oo . . .

JOAN (*displaying her frock*) : Like it ?

KIM : Yes, I *do* ! Swell !

JOAN : Cost four guineas—at a dressmaker I found. Not bad, is it ?

KIM : Looks as if it cost twenty !

JOAN (*laughing*) : *That*, child, was the idea !

KIM : Who are you going with ?

JOAN : Just eating . . . and dancing . . . with a friend of mine.

MARY LOU : What time will you be back ?

JOAN : Oh . . . late-ish ! You'll be fast asleep. Thank you so much, darling. (*She lifts her skirt to display the stockings.*)

KIM : Got a taxi ?

JOAN (*making to go*) : The "boy-friend" is downstairs, waiting, and it's costing him pounds. . . . Thanks so much.

[*She hurries out.*

(*Calling as she goes*) Good-bye.

MARY LOU : Good-bye.

KIM : Good-bye.

MARY LOU : I'm so glad she's going out really properly. She works so hard

KIM : She's a grand girl.

[MARY LOU goes off with remaining pair of stockings. She returns immediately. KIM is hanging out of the window, and looking down into the street. She crosses to him, and they both kneel on the window seat and look out of the window.

MARY LOU : What are you doing ?

KIM : Snooping on the boy-friend !

MARY LOU : Oh, let's see ! (*She leans farther out.*)

KIM (to JOAN, in street below) : Oo-oo ! Oy !
(Aside to MARY LOU) Top-hat, and all !

MARY LOU : Ssh ! He'll hear you. He's a doctor.

KIM : Do they hear well ?

MARY LOU : Can you see his face ?

KIM : No. Oo-oo !

[A taxi-door slams, and taxi moves off. MARY LOU returns to the table KIM joins her, and dips his finger in the raspberry fool and tastes it.

What's this pink stuff ?

MARY LOU : Raspberry fool. Don't do that !

KIM : Do you remember when we were kids ?
What fun it was to come and stay . . . ?

MARY LOU : It's always more fun in other people's houses.

[He crosses over to sofa, and picks up the two dolls, where they are propped amongst the cushions. He holds them up, one in each hand.

KIM : I never can remember which is which of these ?

MARY LOU (laughing) : You ought to know them by now.

KIM : Awful, when a father can't distinguish his own children. That's what's called "confusing your issues."

[He replaces the dolls.

Remember Lucinda and Jane ?

MARY LOU : Fancy you remembering them !
I've got them somewhere.

[She climbs on sofa, and searches among the books in the little shelves. She takes out a small red volume of Beatrix Potter.

KIM (over her shoulder) : Here it is ! *The Tale of Two Bad Mice.*

[They both come forwards. MARY LOU turning the pages, and KIM looking over her shoulder.

MARY LOU (*at one particular page in the book*)
There they are, smashing everything up!

KIM 'Member Tiggy Winkle?

MARY LOU I've got her, too, somewhere

KIM Adored her! Always so busy Ironing all
the time

MARY LOU Fool!

[*They cross over to the large chair. He stoops into it
and draws her on to his knee*

You are a baby!

KIM I like being a baby

[*They laugh and settle back in the chair
(Softly) Drilling*

[*She looks at him*

Comfy?

MARY LOU Um Are you?

KIM More or less Not very

[*He kisses her again, and laughs. She wriggles
down into the chair beside him*

MARY LOU (*more breathily*) Come along! We're
going to read this!

KIM Are we?

MARY LOU (*definitely, and turning the pages of the
little book*) Yes

KIM (*laughing at her*) Go on, then

MARY LOU (*seriously, beginning*) "Once upon
time——"

KIM (*interjecting, and quoting dramatically*)
'There were two bad mice, but they weren't
so very naughty after all, because they paid for
almost everything they broke. They found a
crooked sixpence, under the hearth-rug——"

MARY LOU Oh . . . but you know it all!

KIM Of course I do!

MARY LOU (*disconsolately*) : Oh. . . . (*She gets up.*)
Then . . . I sha'n't read it to you. . . .

[*She crosses to bookcase with book. She says, over her shoulder :*

Put the gramophone on.

[*KIM gets up and crosses to a portable gramophone. He winds it, and it commences to play a dreamy crooning number : " Love is like that " (Columbia record, DB440, sung by Ruth Etting). MARY LOU flings the book on the sofa, and crosses to the table.*

We'll have our food.

[*KIM crosses back to fireplace, and watches her. She adjusts things on the table.*

Hungry ?

KIM : Not very.

[*He watches her.*

Don't do that . . . now.

MARY LOU (*looking up*) : Why ?

KIM (*holding out his hand*) : Come here !

MARY LOU (*crossing to him*) : What ?

KIM : Come and dance with me.

[*She laughs, and they commence to dance. It is more a swaying in each other's arms, to the crooning sentimentality of the record, than anything else. KIM stops, and holds her in his arms. The music continues.*

Queer, isn't it ?

MARY LOU : Um !

KIM : A silly tune like that. What it does to you ?

MARY LOU (*shakily*) : Yes.

[*There is a pause, and he looks at her quietly. . . . He kisses her . . . and regards her.*

KIM : Darling . . . we're pretty good together, aren't we ?

[*She nods, and buries her head against him.*

Darling ! Do you very much want to go to the pictures ?

MARY LOU : Not really.

KIM : Let's stay here !

MARY LOU : Let's.

[*He kisses her lightly again, and holds her more tightly.*

KIM : It's heaven, here. Just ourselves.

[*She nods.*

(*Looking at her fondly*) I do love you so.

MARY LOU (*simply*) : I love you.

[*He kisses her, at first gently, and then passionately. The music continues, and . . .*

THE CURTAIN FALLS

SCENE II

SCENE : MARY LOU's flat, about two months later.
It is late afternoon.

NANNY is sitting in the armchair, sniffing and blowing her nose. She has been crying.

MARY LOU (*coming to door*) : Nanny ?

NANNY (*sighing*) : Yes, dear ?

MARY LOU (*coming into the room, and fastening her belt*) : I wish they'd hurry up and come.

NANNY : They're late, but I expect they'll come.

MARY LOU (*rather unnaturally gay*) :

" Mrs. Barty gave a party. No one came.
Then her brother gave another. Just the same."

[NANNY sniffs audibly.

Oh, Nanny, *please* ! Don't keep on crying about

it. It makes me unhappy, and I don't want to be.

NANNY (*sighs*) : I can't help it.

MARY LOU : Is tea ready ?

NANNY (*getting up*) : Yes.

MARY LOU : Now, Nanny darling, you *must* stop ! Look at me ! I'm not worrying.

[NANNY *pauses, and looks at her.* MARY LOU *kisses her.*

Go on and fix the tea. Make both kinds.

NANNY : All right.

MARY LOU : And, Nanny . . . (*she pauses*) . . . promise me you won't be like this when they come.

NANNY (*going off*) : What do you take me for ?

[MARY LOU *stands looking after her. She turns, and walks slowly across the room. She is a little uncertain. She rather vaguely touches things, particularly a photograph of KIM, which is the same as the one in BLANCHE's house. It is almost a caress. The door flies open, and KIM comes in.*

KIM : Hullo, Funny !

MARY LOU (*turning and smiling*) : Oh, hullo ! It's you !

KIM (*tossing his hat on sofa*) : Yes. It's me. Sweet little Pekinese ! (*Kisses her lightly.*)

MARY LOU : Glad you came in.

KIM : Don't believe it !

[*He kisses her lightly, and flops down in the big armchair.*

Oh, such a day. (*Sighs.*)

MARY LOU : What have you been doing ?

KIM (*smiles and looks at her*) : Well, thanks to your uncle, it's all more or less fixed up. They want me to begin next month. I shall have to go to

night classes, at a school of design and architecture, for a bit. . . .

MARY LOU (*excitedly*) : Oh, darling ! (*She sits impulsively on the arm of his chair.*) I knew Gordon Vickers would take you on.

KIM : I liked him enormously. He seemed to know quite a bit about us. Sent you his love. It's going to be fun now, isn't it ?

MARY LOU : How many nights a week will you have to go to this drawing-place ?

KIM (*cheerfully*) : Three or four, I expect.

MARY LOU : You can come round here afterwards, and we can work out plans for houses and things. Every architect should have a woman's advice.

KIM (*amused*) : Think so ?

MARY LOU : Men never know where to put sinks . . . and things. Have you told your mother ?

KIM : No. Not yet. Only you. She's coming to tea, isn't she ?

MARY LOU : Yes, and Aunt Linda !

KIM : What ? *What* on earth's mother bringin' her up here for ?

MARY LOU : They've been to the Academy together, and she can't shake her off. I don't mind. She's been wanting to come for some time. She means well enough. Poor old trout.

KIM : She doesn't. Old sponge. She only wants to come up here out of curiosity to see the flat. (*Sighs*) All right. I'll be nice to her, for your sake.

MARY LOU (*a little petulantly*) : I like that ! I'm doing this for *your* sake. (*Quietly*) Only you don't seem to realise it.

KIM (*putting his arm around her*) : All right, darling. Well, we'll both be particularly nice to her, for each other's sake. You're very antagonistic today. What's the matter ?

MARY LOU (*with a fleeting smile*) : No, I'm not. I didn't mean to be. (*Suddenly kisses him, gets up, and stands away from him.*) Kim?

KIM : What's the matter ?

[*He looks at her, enquiringly.*]

MARY LOU : Kim, there's something I've got to tell you. (*Very serious now*) There is something you ought to . . . know. . . .

KIM (*half-laughing, half-serious*) : What is it ?

MARY LOU (*looking at him steadily*) : You'd better take a good grip of yourself . . . (*she laughs a little uncertainly*) . . . because . . . because . . . I'm going to give you an awful jolt !

KIM (*laughing at her*) : Are you going to tell me, "Our love has all been a mistake, and you've just found me out in time" ?

MARY LOU : No. Nothing like that. I'm quite serious.

KIM : What is it, then ? Come on . . . I hate mysteries.

MARY LOU (*a little shy*) : Kim . . . Kim . . . We're going to have . . . a baby. . .

[*She looks at him, clearly, with no regret. He is quite dumbfounded. He doesn't quite believe her.*]

KIM (*inclined to laugh*) : We're what ?

MARY LOU : It's true.

KIM (*dumbfounded*) : God ! . . . but how . . . frightful ! . . . But . . . how . . . how do you know ?

MARY LOU : Joan. She knows all about these things, and so . . . you see . . . that's . . . how I know. . . .

[*KIM momentarily is at a loss. He gets up and takes her in his arms. She clings to him.*]

Oh, Kim . . . you're . . . you're . . . not cross about it?

KIM (*recovering himself*) · No. No, of course not. Of course I'm not cross about it . . . but . . . but . . . it's rather a surprise. . . Why didn't you tell me before?

MARY LOU : Because . . . I didn't know until I had talked to Joan. . .

KIM (*holding her tenderly in his arms*) · Oh . . . darling. . . .

[*She is confused, and on the verge of tears.*]

(*Gently*) Darling . . . don't be frightened about it.

MARY LOU I'm not I'm not frightened Oh, Kim. (*She clings to him*) I'm so glad I told you . . . though. . .

KIM : So am I

MARY LOU : We . . . we . . . haven't done anything . . . awful . . . have we?

KIM · No, darling

MARY LOU (*uncertainly*) · No?

KIM : No. Nothing to be ashamed of, if that's what you mean. It's . . . (*half laughs, a little wonderingly*) . . . rather marvellous!

MARY LOU (*relieved*) Oh, I'm so glad you see it like that . . . because . . . I thought it was . . . too. . .

KIM : Well, of course, I see it like that! Because . . . because . . . don't you see, darling, we'll have to get married now? . . .

MARY LOU (*realising it*) : Yes Yes, I suppose we will.

KIM : Oh, I say. Poor old mother. (*Pause.*) It's going to be rather hell telling her . . . isn't it?

MARY LOU : Yes.

KIM : You know, I don't believe she'll mind terribly. After all, it's not such a very awful thing to have a baby . . . is . . . is it ?

MARY LOU : I . . . don't think it is.

KIM : I say, do you know anything about them ?

MARY LOU : Not much. Do you ?

KIM (*laughing*) : Not a dam' thing ! We'll have to buy a lot of books, and read it all up.

[*Suddenly realising his responsibilities.*

I say, shouldn't you be sitting down, or something ?

MARY LOU : No, of course not ! (*She sits*)
Nothing will happen for ages yet.

KIM (*not quite sure*) : Won't it ?

MARY LOU : Ages.

KIM (*becoming almost pompous*) : You know, I'll have to treat you quite differently. I'll buy you lots of classical gramophone records, and once a week we'll go to the National Gallery and look at the madonnas.

[*She laughs.*

But it's all most important ! What *did* Joan say ?

MARY LOU (*vaguely*) : Oh . . . a lot of things.

KIM : No, I mean, was she annoyed with us ?

MARY LOU : No. She was sweet. I went to her . . . well . . . because they always say you can't shock doctors, so I thought she'd be the same. . . .

KIM (*meaning it*) : I *do* like Joan.

MARY LOU (*simply*) : She likes you, too.

KIM : Does she ?

MARY LOU : You know she does.

[*Pause.*

KIM : Darling, I'm *so* glad about it.

MARY LOU (*happily*) : So am I.

[NANNY enters with tea-things, which she places on the table. She is busy for a moment, and then turns and looks at them.]

NANNY (a little grimly) : Well, have you told him

KIM : It's all your fault, Nanny !

NANNY (spluttering, and a little emotional) : Well. . . . Oh, Mr. Kim . . .

KIM : We're going to call the baby " Hippodrome " ! !

[NANNY dissolves into tears.]

MARY LOU (going to her) : Kim ! . . . (O) Nanny . . .

[She clings to her, upset herself.]

NANNY (controlling herself) : There, there, don't you worry, dearie. It's me that's got to do all that.

KIM : Nanny, you'll stand by us in this, won't you ?

[NANNY nods.]

NANNY : Yes, but you'll have to get married.

KIM : Well, of course !

NANNY (satisfied) : That's all right, then.

MARY LOU (impulsively) : You'll stay with us, won't you ?

NANNY : If you'll still be wanting me.

KIM : Just you try and leave us.

[NANNY smiles. She becomes unduly busy with the tea-things. The door-bell rings. They all look a little guilty, and assume a casual normality.]

MARY LOU : Here they are. Now, Nanny, be careful. Leave this to us.

[NANNY nods, and goes to door.]

KIM (quietly to MARY LOU) : You're all right now ?

MARY LOU (*nods*) : Um.

[KIM stands by the fireplace, carelessly. MARY LOU powders her nose. NANNY is at the door.

NANNY (*guarding the door*) : Are you ready ?

KIM : Yes. Let 'em all come !

[NANNY smooths her apron, and smilingly opens the door. BLANCHE and LINDA are on the threshold. They are in street clothes.

BLANCHE (*coming in cheerfully*) : Hullo, Nanny !

NANNY : Good afternoon, madam.

BLANCHE (*coming into the room, followed by LINDA*) : Well, darlings ? Here we are ! I'm sorry if we are a bit late, but we've been to the Academy, and Linda insisted on looking at the miniatures, and you know what *that* means !

[She kisses MARY LOU. NANNY closes the door, pauses, and retires.

MARY LOU : It's so nice to see you.

LINDA (*from behind BLANCHE*) : That's right, blame me ! How are you, Mary Lou ? (*Kisses her.*) Oh, what a climb up those stairs !

[BLANCHE crosses to KIM, pats him, and he places a chair for her.

KIM : Sit here, mother.

BLANCHE (*settling herself*) : Thank you, dear.

MARY LOU (*to LINDA*) : It is rather a pull.

LINDA : Pull ? You must be very near heaven here ! How are you, Kim ?

KIM (*almost over-politely*) : Won't you sit 'down, Aunt Linda ?

LINDA (*doing so*) : Thank you.

BLANCHE (*to MARY LOU*) : Well, Mary Lou, what have you been doing with yourself ? I haven't seen you for a day or two.

MARY LOU : I've been rather busy. At the Slade, and things. I've been trying my hand at caricature.

BLANCHE : Now I suppose none of us will be safe ! She's so clever, Linda.

MARY LOU : I'm not, really. . . .

BLANCHE : Oh, yes, you are !

[NANNY enters with teapots, etc., on a tray.

Oh, tea ! Lovely ! That's what we need. (*Looks across.*) What a lovely cake, Nanny. One of yours ?

NANNY : I make most of the things round here.

BLANCHE : It looks a beauty.

NANNY : When you make a thing yourself, you do know it's wholesome, and that's a lot, I say.

BLANCHE : Indeed it is. (*LINDA nods affably.*)

MARY LOU (*dismissing NANNY*) : It's all very nice, thank you, Nanny.

[NANNY goes off. MARY LOU pours tea, and hands a cup to KIM for BLANCHE.

KIM (*handing tea*) : Mother ?

BLANCHE (*taking cup*) : Oh, thank you, dear. That's just how I like it.

MARY LOU : Aunt Linda ? How do you like your tea ? China ?

LINDA : I'd prefer Indian, if you've got it.

MARY LOU : Of course. (*She picks up the second pot.*) Milk or lemon ?

LINDA : Sugar ! (*KIM hands her her cup.*) Can you see the river from here ?

MARY LOU (*still pouring tea*) : Not actually the river, but we see "HOVIS BREAD." It's rather pretty at night.

LINDA : Oh.

[MARY LOU hands KIM his tea, and pours her own. He puts it on the table and hands LINDA sandwiches.

(Helping herself) You should be at work, Kim, not having tea, on a fine afternoon like this.

KIM (pleasantly) : In a few weeks' time, I probably shall be, Aunt Linda.

LINDA : I'm glad to hear it.

BLANCHE : What work are you going to do, darling ?

KIM : I didn't want to tell you until I was certain. I'm going to work with Gordon Vickers. He likes my stuff, such as it is.

BLANCHE (delighted) : But . . . how lovely, dear !

MARY LOU : Uncle Dick fixed it for him. He said a lot of nice things about him.

LINDA : Well, you should be very pleased, Blanche.

BLANCHE : But I am ! Terribly pleased ! Lovely, dear. . . . Fancy old Uncle Dick !
(Laughs.)

LINDA : Now you will have to prove it to us with results, Kim. . . .

KIM : I hope I can, Aunt Linda. Have some cake ?

LINDA (taking it) : Thank you.

KIM : Mother ?

BLANCHE (taking cake) : Thank you, dear.

LINDA (settling back, and looking about) : This is a very nice little flat, Mary Lou. It's a little . . . artistic-looking . . . but it's very cheerful and pretty.

MARY LOU (pleasantly) : I'm glad you like it, Aunt Linda.

BLANCHE : I love it !

[*She smiles at KIM and MARY LOU.*

LINDA : I suppose this departure into architecture of yours, Kim, will definitely put a s. p. to your going up to Oxford ?

KIM : Quite definitely, I should think, Aunt Linda.

LINDA : Well, I think it's a pity. Your father was there . . . and David, and Tony. . . .

[*There is a pause. BLANCHE says nothing. The door opens and JOAN comes in. She wears the coat and skirt of the previous scene. She stops short, not expecting a party.*

JOAN : Oh, I'm sorry. I didn't know you were having a party.

KIM : Hullo ! Come in. . . .

MARY LOU : Come in, darling. It's not a party.

BLANCHE : Of course it's a party. It's a *lovely* party !

MARY LOU (*laughing*) : Behold my mother-in-law !

[*BLANCHE nods understandingly.*

LINDA : Mother-in-law ?

[*They all laugh.*

BLANCHE : She always calls me that, dear ; I dare say I might be some day. Who knows ?

LINDA : I think you're all rather extraordinary !

MARY LOU : We are a bit. You'll have to get used to us, Aunt Linda. I'm sorry, Joan. You don't know each other. Aunt Linda, this is Joan Trevor.

LINDA : How do you do ? What are you ? A sister-in-law ?

MARY LOU : No. She's just my best friend. More tea, anyone ? Joan ?

JOAN : No. I've had tea. (*Takes a piece of cake.*)
I'd like a lump of this, though

[JOAN crosses and sits on settee.

MARY LOU : Aunt Linda.'

LINDA : I have some, thank you.

KIM : Is that chair quite comfortable, Aunt Linda?

LINDA : Quite, thank you I like sitting up straight.

[*There is rather a deadlock in conversation, LINDA's presence making it all a little stilled.*

BLANCHE (*handing her up*) : I'd like some more, dear, if I may.

MARY LOU : I'm so sorry.

BLANCHE : I went out with David and Judith yesterday, Mary Lou, in the new car!

MARY LOU : Oh . . . (*pouring tea, and handing it to BLANCHE*) . . . have they got it at last?

BLANCHE (*with great finality*) : Yes, they got the 'Roley,' after all.

KIM : The Rover, mother dear.

BLANCHE (*placidly*) : The Rover, then. It's such a nice little car, and goes so well.

LINDA : They must come and take me out one day. I want to go down to Horsham, to see Vera Summering. She and the Colonel are living there now. He's retired, you know. . . .

BLANCHE : See who, dear? (*Vaguely. LINDA's friends are not hers.*)

LINDA : Vera Summering. Pindi . . . you know. . . .

BLANCHE : Oh, yes . . . nice woman.

LINDA : I wonder if David would run me down?

BLANCHE : I don't know, dear. Why don't you ask him ? I'm sure he would if he could. He's terribly busy at the office just now with all his stocks and shares.

LINDA : Some Sunday, perhaps.

KIM : There's a very good train service, Aunt Linda.

LINDA (*ignoring this, and to JOAN*) : Are you an artist, too ?

JOAN : Oh dear, no. Nothing half so exciting

KIM : She's a Florence Nightingale !

LINDA : Are you a nurse ?

JOAN : Not quite. I'm a masseuse. I work at a hospital.

LINDA : Oh, yes. Very interesting. Have you any of your work here, Mary Lou ? I'd be interested to see some of it.

MARY LOU : Oh, I haven't got much. There's *that*, in that frame, there. (*Turning and indicating a very impressionistic landscape over the door.*)

LINDA (*turning, and with lorgnettes*) : Oh, yes. Yes. I've been trying to make out what *that* was

KIM (*laughing*) : Spongers at play, Aunt Linda.

MARY LOU (*airily, as to someone who couldn't possibly understand*) : It's just a landscape.

LINDA : Oh, yes.

MARY LOU : It's part of Hampstead Heath really, from the north side.

LINDA : Yes. They had a picture of the Heath in the Academy.

KIM : Ah, but I expect that would be from the *other* side, Aunt Linda.

[BLANCHE looks at the picture, and smiles. MARY LOU laughs.]

KIM (*having picked up a portfolio*) : Can I show Aunt Linda these caricatures you did ?

MARY LOU (*slightly embarrassed*) Oh, they're no good.

KIM · Yes, they are They're jolly good.

[*He hands LINDA and BLANCHE several sheets of bristol-board with crayon sketches MARY LOU is a little self-conscious.*

LINDA (*holding them out*) Oh . . . but these are better.

BLANCHE (*doing the same*) These are awfully good, dear. Are they like the people they're meant to be ? (*Looking at one in particular*) This one . . . seems . . . vaguely familiar.

KIM (*over her shoulder, and laughing*) · Oh, that ! That's David and Judith, on *any* Sunday afternoon.

MARY LOU (*hastily*) · Oh . . . I didn't mean you to see that one

BLANCHE (*smiling*) Oh . . . it's very naughty (*Laughs*) Still . . . (*she holds it out*) it's very good. I don't think I'd leave that one lying about, though. . .

KIM · No, dear.

LINDA : May . . . I see ?

[*BLANCHE hands it to her. LINDA is immensely pleased with it.*

Oh . . . yes . . . (*chuckles to herself*) . . . yes . . . that's very good. . . . Look at Judith . . . She has on the jumper I gave her . . . Oh, yes, that's very good. . . .

[*Behind her back, KIM shows BLANCHE another sketch, which is obviously LINDA They laugh together, and he hastily replaces it in the portfolio*

MARY LOU (*suddenly*) · Would you like to see the rest of the flat, Aunt Linda ?

LINDA (*rising*) : Thank you . . . I would.

MARY LOU (*jumping up, and leading the way*)
Come along. This is the kitchenette . . . through
here. . . .

LINDA (*going off*) Oh, yes The kitchenette

MARY LOU (*going through*) Nanny's wing.

LINDA (*off*) I like the blue

[BLANCHE rises, and puts her tea-cup on the
mantelpiece.

BLANCHE (*to KIM*) Linda's enjoying herself!

KIM (*after a slight pause, with a glance at JOAN*
Mother?

BLANCHE (*turning*) Yes, what is it?

KIM · Mother Mary Lou and I want to talk
to you alone Can we?

BLANCHE (*unruffled*) · Do you, dear? What
about?

KIM We can't tell you in front of Linda Can't
we get rid of her somehow?

BLANCHE Not very well, dear (*Smiles*) Why?
Is it so private?

KIM · Yes It is

JOAN (*coming forward*) Can I help?

KIM (*to JOAN*) · How?

JOAN : I can take her upstairs and show her my
flat.

KIM · Could you?

JOAN · I should think so. . . .

KIM · Keep her up there for . . . about ten
minutes Show her your goldfish . . . anything.

JOAN : All right (*She smiles understandingly*) I'll
show her everything. Don't worry

KIM (*gratefully*) · Thanks, Joan.

[LINDA and MARY LOU are heard returning.

LINDA (*off*) : I think I'd have the blue. . .

MARY LOU : Yes, I expect I shall.

[*They come into the room.*]

KIM (*suddenly as LINDA appears*) : Of course, I think the important thing is always to have the right pressure in the air-cushions.

LINDA : What air-cushions ? (*Feeling she has missed something.*)

KIM (*glbly*) : In David's car, Aunt Linda. You'll sit on them when he takes you down to Horsham.

BLANCHE (*quickly*) : The nice red ones I was telling you about, Linda. They're so comfortable.

LINDA (*a little puzzled, and suspicious*) : Oh . . . Yes . . . yes.

KIM : What do you think of the flat ?

LINDA : Well . . . (*laughs*) . . . it's different !

MARY LOU (*leading her across into the bedroom*) : Nanny and I like it different.

LINDA (*looking into bedroom*) : Oh . . . yes . . .

JOAN (*to LINDA*) : If you could manage one more flight, Lady Maddox, I'll show you mine. I'd love you to see it.

LINDA : Are you above this ?

JOAN : Yes, I've got the roof. It's not so big as this, but, then I'm there all by myself.

MARY LOU (*quickly*) : Oh, do take her up. Hers is sweet, Aunt Linda. Not a bit "different." Just the same.

LINDA (*pleased*) : Thank you. I'd like to . . . so long as there aren't too many stairs.

JOAN : Only one floor. Come along.

[*They cross to door.*]

KIM : You can see the Battersea Power Station from there, Aunt Linda.

LINDA : Well, that's an inducement ! Are you coming, Blanche ?

BLANCHE : No, dear, I'm *not* ! I'll stay here.

JOAN (*showing LINDA through the door*) : I haven't got much, except what Nanny calls a "few rather nice pieces," that belonged to my mother

LINDA (*going off*) : Well, I'm always interested to see good furniture.

[*They go out and close the door.* BLANCHE falls
KIM and MARY LOU.

BLANCHE : Now, come on ? What is it ?

KIM (*with some hesitation*) : Mother, dear, we want to speak to you. We want to ask you . . . about getting married.

BLANCHE : Who ?

KIM : Mary Lou and me.

BLANCHE : Don't be ridiculous !

MARY LOU : We've always wanted to. You see . . . we feel we were sort of born with it . . . like . . . like the shapes of our ears.

BLANCHE : Darlings ! I mean there's nothing that would make me happier . . . but you must wait a little while. You're both *far* too young. Kim must find something to do first, and have a career. It's bad for you not to have a calling in life.

MARY LOU : We have ourselves as a calling.

KIM : And I *am* going to have a career.

BLANCHE : Yes, I know, dear . . . but . . . do wait a little . . . just to please me.

KIM : How long ?

BLANCHE : Well . . . (*after a moment's thought*)
a . . . a . . . year.

KIM : A *year* !

MARY LOU (*looking at KIM, and in a hurried little voice*) : But . . . but we mustn't.

KIM (*quietly*) : No.

BLANCHE : What do you mean . . . you mustn't ?

MARY LOU : We can't.

KIM (*embarrassed, and finding it very difficult*) : Mother ?

[BLANCHE looks at him questioningly].

Mother, please don't be angry with us, and with what we are going to say . . . but . . . but . . . *all in a rush*) . . . Mary Lou's . . . going to have a baby.

[*He remains quite still, looking at her. BLANCHE is nonplussed. Her expression changes from one of cheerful enquiry to great distress. She is dumb-founded.*]

BLANCHE : Oh, Kim !

KIM (*with an involuntary movement*) : Darling . . .

[BLANCHE looks first at MARY LOU, and then at him. She is a little indignant.]

Oh, mother . . . mother, dear, don't be angry.

BLANCHE (*sitting down in the chair*) : Angry ! !

[*She bursts into tears.*]

MARY LOU (*hurriedly*) : Please don't . . .

[*There is a pause, and BLANCHE is very upset. She tries to be reasonable.*]

BLANCHE (*she wipes her eyes*) : I just can't believe —this. I can't. I can't believe it.

MARY LOU (*going to her*) : Oh, darling, please ! We're terribly happy about it.

BLANCHE (*they both sit on her chair, on either side*) : Oh, Mary Lou. (*She clutches her, and looks at them.*) Happy ? Are you ?

KIM (*with great sincerity*) Terribly You see, we'll have to get married now, won't we?

BLANCHE (*slowly*) Yes (*Realising it*) Yes I suppose you will (*Holding them*) I . . . suppose you can't stop youth!

KIM Oh, mother We didn't want to hurt you

[BLANCHE gets up, worried, but facing it]

BLANCHE Oh Kim, Kim, Kim O my children, why do you worry me so!

[KIM and MARY LOU remain at a loss]

(*More collected*) Well, when would you like to be married? It will all take some little time to arrange

KIM Well, soon

BLANCHE (*realising it completely*) Soon! Yes I suppose you're right

KIM (*hastily*) Mother! Not a big wedding! We don't want that!

BLANCHE But (*un-understandingly*) you'd like a nice wedding, wouldn't you, Mary Lou?

MARY LOU Oh, no! I'd hate a "nice" wedding I've always loathed the idea of asking all your friends to come and watch you being married It's *our* business, Not *theirs*!

BLANCHE (*genuinely uncomprehending*) Well I don't understand

KIM (*quickly*) Yes, you do, darling Mary Lou, right We'd much sooner have a quiet wedding

BLANCHE (*trying to understand*) You mean just the family Yes, perhaps that would be best Oh (*toying with the thought*) but I do have loved a nice wedding You're all I've got left, you two

KIM Do you mind terribly?

BLANCHE (*looking at them*) Yes, I do mind!

but . . . but . . . if you're happy . . . (*reasoning with herself*) . . . and it's what you want . . .

[*She turns and faces them, more collected*

Now, listen. I'm going to ask you to do something for *me*, now..

KIM . What, darling ?

BLANCHE (*meaning it*) I want you both to come home . . . after you're married (*Hastily*) Not for always, but . . . but . . . just for a little while The nursery's there That house is so big, and full of ghosts for me Will you ? Till this is over ?

MARY LOU (*quickly, and meaning it*) Of course ! We'd love to.

BLANCHE (*unable to conceal her eagerness*) Would you ? . . . Really ?

KIM (*reassuringly*) 'Course

BLANCHE (*with terrific relief*) Oh, I'm so glad

MARY LOU May I bring Nanny ?

BLANCHE (*enthusiastically*) But of course, darling. I want you to bring *everything* I want it to be *our home* (*Impulsively going to them*) Come and kiss me, both

[*They do so, rather emotionally, and for a moment all rather cling together*

My treasures !

[*She is crying slightly, but smiling through her tears. They break away, the children relaxed it is over. LINDA and JOAN return*

LINDA (*chattily, as she comes through the door*) - It's so nice up there Quite a dear little place, and Nanny is quite right. She has got some very nice pieces.

JOAN (*meaningly*) : I wanted to take her up on the roof . . . but . . . she finked the iron steps.

KIM (*betraying nothing*) : Oh, yes. Far too steep, Aunt Linda. You might have hurt yourself getting up there.

LINDA : I daresay I'd have got up all right. It's the coming down that is so difficult. We found that a tragedy had occurred.

MARY LOU : Oh ?

LINDA : One of her goldfish had died. The female. Floating in the bowl. It looked very dead, poor little object.

BLANCHE (*sympathetically*) . Oh. . . .

JOAN : I shall have to visit Mr. Woolworth again.

BLANCHET (*wiping her eyes, and almost without thinking*) : How can you tell with fish ? I mean whether they're hes . . . or . . . shes ?

KIM By their names, darling.

BLANCHET (*laughs*) : Oh. . . .

[*There is a slightly awkward pause.*]

LINDA You look tired, Blanche. I think perhaps it's time we were going home.

BLANCHE : I am a little. (*To MARY LOU*) I think perhaps we had. You're coming over to dinner, aren't you, Mary Lou ?

MARY LOU : Yes.

BLANCHE : Would you like to come, too, Joan ?

JOAN (*assisting LINDA to collect her belongings*) Yes . . . I'd love to . . . but . . . (*a little uncertainly*) . . . do you really want me ?

BLANCHE : Yes, of course we do. (*Dismissing it*) Just a quiet little evening round the fire.

JOAN : I should love that.

LINDA : I have to go back to Harrods, don't forget. (*To BLANCHE*) To change that wedding present. (*To MARY LOU*) Three weddings this

month. Such an expense! The last one is broken off, but they're taking it back, thank goodness.

MARY LOU : Oh, really?

KIM : What was it, Aunt Linda?

LINDA : A silver cake-basket . . . or rather it's very good electro-plate

KIM (*quickly*) Oh, they'll take *that* back!

[*All laugh, and LINDA misses the point.*]

LINDA (*to BLANCHE, who has sat in chair, and is rather lost in her thoughts*) : Well . . . Blanche . . . are you coming?

BLANCHE : What? (*After a moment's hesitation*) Oh . . . no, dear, I think you'd better go on, or Harrods will be closed. I rather want to go straight home.

LINDA : Oh. (*Tactlessly*) I could drop you.

BLANCHE : No thank you, darling. I'll wait . . . with these. (*Indicating KIM and MARY LOU.*) We can all go home together.

KIM (*to LINDA*) : We'll take her back with us, when we go.

LINDA : Oh.

KIM (*to LINDA quickly*) : I'll get you a taxi, Aunt Linda.

LINDA : Don't bother. I'll walk up to the King's Road, and get a bus. (*Turns to MARY LOU*) Thank you for asking me, Mary Lou. It's been very interesting, seeing where you live. I like your little place.

MARY LOU : I'm so glad you could come, Aunt Linda.

LINDA : Yes. Well . . . (*smiles at them all*) . . . Good-bye.

KIM : Good-bye. (*Holding open the door for her.*)

MARY LOU : Good-bye.

BLANCHE : Good-bye, dear.

JOAN : I'll show you down.

LINDA : Oh . . . thank you.

[LINDA goes out, followed by JOAN.]

JOAN (*turning at door, and looking back*) : I'll just run upstairs and change

[BLANCHE nods. JOAN closes the door. BLANCHE sits and looks at the two children. MARY LOU suddenly becomes emotional and runs to her. She falls at her feet, her head in BLANCHE'S lap. KIM crosses and stands behind her. BLANCHE strokes MARY LOU'S head.]

BLANCHE Don't cry, darling. Don't cry. I'm not angry . . .

[MARY LOU looks at her with a tear-stained face.]

MARY LOU It . . . isn't that (*She dries her eyes*)
But when we told you just now . . . about us . . .
you . . . you . . . weren't thinking of Tony . . .
were you?

BLANCHE (*thoughtfully, and simply*) : I always think of Tony.

KIM (*sincerely, and quickly*) But, darling, you mustn't . . .

BLANCHE (*looking at him*) Of course I must. ¹

[*She smiles faintly, and puts her arm around them*]
I loved Tony . . . just as I love you . . . but
Tony's gone . . . (*she looks at their young faces*)
and you're just beginning.

THE CURTAIN FALLS

ACT III

SCENE I

SCENE : *The same as Act I. BLANCHE'S room in the Knightsbridge house. It is seven months later, and the time is about ten-thirty p.m.*

KIM *is standing alone by the fireplace. He is restlessly smoking a cigarette and appears to be under a degree of tension. He looks older and strained. He crosses restlessly to the window, looks out, for no apparent reason, and crosses the room, stubbing his cigarette on an ash-tray in passing. He sits down on the fire-stool rather hopelessly. The door opens, and HESTER comes in quietly. He jumps up immediately, in a startled way.*

KIM : Has anything happened, Hester ?

HESTER : No, Mr. Kim. Miss Trevor is here.

KIM (*with relief*) : Oh, bring her in, Hester. (*He takes a step towards the door.*) Joan ! !

JOAN (*coming in quickly*) : Hullo, my dear.

[*She crosses straight to him. He grasps her emotionally.*]

KIM : Oh, Joan, thank God you've come !

JOAN : I thought I'd just come over and stay with you for a bit. I thought it might help. *She smiles at him encouragingly.*

KIM : I'd go mad if I stayed here much longer by myself. Joan . . . this waiting is ghastly. . . .

JOAN (*kindly*) : You mustn't worry. She'll be all right.

KIM (*almost irritably*) : How do you expect me not to worry ? That's what they all say to me. Don't worry ! Don't worry ! Don't worry ! I've had it all day.

JOAN (*gently*) : I know.

KIM : I feel frightful !

JOAN : Come and sit down. (*Holds out her hands to him.*) Perhaps . . . we . . . (*a little uncertainly*) . . . could play patience, or something. . . .

KIM (*hardly heeding her*) : Oh, no, I can't do that.

JOAN (*persisting*) : Well, sit down . . . anyway. . .

[*He makes no move. She gets up and gently guides him to the sofa.*]

Come on. This sort of thing isn't going to do you, or anyone else, any good. You *must* buck up !

KIM (*quietly*) : I know.

[*He brushes his eyes. He looks at her suddenly. She smiles back. He gets up, gives a short laugh, and walks about again.*]

Oh, I'm sorry, Joan. You're being sweet, but it's not much good.

JOAN : Talk to me.

KIM (*irritably*) : What on earth about ?

JOAN : Oh, anything. Don't think I don't know how you're feeling. I'm only trying to help you. I don't expect you *not* to worry. That's absurd, but you must get a grip of yourself.

KIM : I . . . can't. . . . (*He almost breaks down again.*) You know all about it. I just can't bear her being up there with all those nurses and people. Dr. Jeffries got here an hour ago. It's more than an hour. How long *does* it take ? (*He looks at her imploringly.*)

JOAN : But it depends, my dear, on . . . lots . . . of things.

KIM : How do you mean, *lots* of things ?

JOAN : Well, all sorts of things, darling. I don't know. . . . I don't know, but it will be all right. She'd hate to know you were all upset like this.

[*He just looks at her.*]

KIM (*tensely*) : She cried out just now. I heard her. Down here ! Oh, God ! I nearly died. Oh, Joan . . . (*he turns to her*) . . . I wish we hadn't got married at all now.

JOAN (*kindly*) : You don't really.

KIM (*emotionally*) : Well, I can't bear this.

JOAN (*placidly*) : Is Dr. Jeffries nice ?

KIM : He's all right. Funny old fish. Hardly spoke to me. Just looked at me as though he thought I was the hall porter or something. I suppose I did look a bit funny.

JOAN : Doctors are often like that.

KIM (*petulantly*) : I'm not a child !

JOAN : No.

KIM : Well, I'm not ! I'm *nineteen* ! (*Heatedly*) That's the trouble with them all. They will keep on at me, as though I were. As if I'd nothing to do with it !

[*He paces restlessly about the room.*]

JOAN : Where's your mother ?

KIM : She's up there. I wish she'd come down. She's been up there for hours now. They wouldn't let me go in.

JOAN (*laughing*) : I should think not !

KIM : Well, it's as much my business as anyone's. We've always done everything together, so why can't we do this ?

JOAN : I'd leave it all to Dr. Jeffries, if I were you.

KIM (*rather plaintively*) : Joan ?

JOAN : What ?

KIM : She'll be all right . . . won't she ? Because . . . because . . . Oh, Joan . . . if anything happened to her . . .

JOAN : Of course she'll be all right. Try and realise that everyone, everyone in the world,

has to go through this . . . just to be born. None of us would be here at all, otherwise.

KIM : I know . . . but . . . I had no idea it would be like this.

[*Pause ; and he starts suddenly.*

Did . . . did . . . you hear anything ?

JOAN (*a little afraid herself*) : No . . . I don't think so.

KIM : I thought I heard her call out again. (*Looking at her anxiously.*)

JOAN : Do try and relax . . . just to please me

[*KIM is very shaken. The door opens, and BLANCHE comes in. She looks rather worried and strained. He goes to her eagerly.*

KIM : Mother . . . mother . . . ? Is she . . . ? How is she ?

BLANCHE (*with her arm around him*) : She's all right, dear. Just try and be patient.

KIM : Oh, hell !

BLANCHE : But she's all right, dear, and she sent you her love.

KIM (*eagerly*) : Did she ?

BLANCHE : Yes, and Dr. Jeffries says everything is quite all right. (*She sits on fire-stool.*)

KIM (*moving and sitting beside her*) : Oh, mother, was it so awful, when we were born ?

BLANCHE : No, dear. Not so awful. It's . . . it's a thing all women have to face.

KIM : Yes, I know, but I hardly think of Mary Lou as a woman at all.

BLANCHE (*kisses him*) : Just try and be calm and patient for a little while longer. I'll go up and see her again in a moment.

[*HESTER enters.*

HESTER : Lady Maddox is here, madam.

[*She looks a little apprehensive.*

KIM (*quickly*) : Oh, mother, don't let *her* come in here !

[LINDA is in by this time.

LINDA (*coming through the door*) : I'm sorry if I'm not wanted. I only came over to see if I could be of any help.

BLANCHE : Oh. That was kind of you, Linda, but everything is quite all right. We're all a little worried, naturally.

LINDA : Yes, I suppose you are. How do you do, Joan? Well, now that I am here, I suppose I may as well sit down.

BLANCHE : 'Course, dear.

[*There is rather a pause, and LINDA sits comfortably in big armchair.*

LINDA : Well, Kim ? (*She is irritatingly cheerful.*)

[KIM just looks at her, and turns away.

Oh, come. You mustn't give way to feelings. You must learn to take these things in your stride. *You* look tired, Blanche. Relax and rest, while you can.

BLANCHE : Oh, I'm all right. It's just a little wearying . . . this waiting.

KIM (*suddenly*) : Mother, I think I'll go out for a bit, just to get some air.

BLANCHE (*quickly*) : Yes, of course, dear. Do that.

JOAN (*jumping up*) : Yes. Come along.

KIM : Thanks.

BLANCHE : You'd better have a coat.

KIM : It's in the hall.

LINDA : It's pouring with rain. You'll get very wet.

BLANCHE : Oh, is it ?

KIM : I don't care.

[*He touches LINDA almost apologetically as he goes to the door.*

BLANCHE : Don't go far.

KIM (*going through door, followed by JOAN, and almost irritably*) : Is it *likely* !

LINDA : Wouldn't it have been much better for you all, Blanche, if she had gone to a nursing-home ?

BLANCHE : Oh, no, Linda. I couldn't bear that. She's much happier here. Poor child would have been terrified. No, she's in my room—where they were all born.

LINDA : Where are you sleeping ?

BLANCHE : What ? (*Pre-occupied*) Me ? Oh, I'm in David's old room.

LINDA : Oh. (*Pause.*) Kim shouldn't work himself up like that. He's far too highly strung. He's in a terrific state of nerves. Anyone would think it was *he* who was having the baby.

BLANCHE : It's no good talking like that, Linda. I think it's quite understandable. It's almost worse for him. Isn't it natural, poor child ?

LINDA : That's just what you won't realise, Blanche. He's *not* a child. He's just about to become a father ?

BLANCHE : Yes. I don't think I ever . . . will . . . quite realise that.

LINDA : After all, how old were you when you had David ?

BLANCHE : Things were different then, Linda. It was usual to marry young. We all did.

LINDA : And I often think we were much better for it. Most girls wait too long nowadays in order to jump into money, and I'm inclined to think they lose a lot of happiness.

BLANCHE : Yes, I know. That's why I'm glad about this . . . as long as they come through this part . . . all right.

LINDA : Yes. Quite. And they will. That's why

I always think at a time like this the thing to do is to remain as calm as possible. After all, my dear, it's not such a very extraordinary thing to have a baby.

BLANCHE : No, dear, but it's always a risk.

LINDA : Well, try and not let it be.

BLANCHE (*she is really not listening*) : I'm rather worried myself, Linda, about Mary Lou. I don't altogether like the look of the child.

LINDA : Oh ?

BLANCHE : She's . . . she's . . . so transparent-looking.

LINDA : Who've you got ? Old Jeffries ?

BLANCHE : Yes. Old Jeffries. We couldn't have anyone else.

LINDA : Well, he's all right. He must have brought thousands of babies into the world by now.

BLANCHE (*a little insistently*) : You've never had a baby, Linda, so you don't know what it's like.

LINDA : I think I can imagine.

BLANCHE : You can't ! No one can imagine !

LINDA : Well, when you think of all the babies born daily, Blanche, it can't be such a precarious business.

BLANCHE (*kindly, but definitely, and getting up*) : Linda, it was very sweet of you to come over, dear, and I hope you won't mind, but I'm going to ask you to go home now. Kim will be back directly, and I know he wants to be alone in here, so you won't mind, dear, will you ?

LINDA : Very well. (*A little stiffly*) But . . . I'm naturally interested. (*She gets up*) As the only aunt of the family . . . I at least thought . . .

BLANCHE : I know, dear, and don't think I don't want you. It's only that I don't want Kim

to find anyone here when he gets back. Joan is a little different. She's his own age.

LINDA : And there's nothing I can do ?

BLANCHE : No, dear. Nothing. We'll telephone you later, just as soon as it's all over. . . .

LINDA . I don't expect you will. You'll all be so completely unbalanced, I shall be forgotten.

[BLANCHE looks at her a little helplessly. She is being unnecessarily difficult.]

I'd better ring you.

BLANCHE (*patiently*) Just as you like, dear, but when I say I'll do a thing, I usually do it.

LINDA Well, perhaps you'd all feel happier if you're by yourselves. If it's stopped raining, I shall walk home, and then you may have rung by the time I get there. Leave a message, if you do.

BLANCHE . I will.

LINDA . Don't you go wearing yourself out over this. I know what you are.

BLANCHE (*getting her to the door*) Oh, I'm all right.

LINDA . Well, keep your head. Have you a good nurse ?

BLANCHE (*tired*) Yes. Two. And Nanny's there.

[HESTER enters, just as they are about to leave.]

HESTER . Please, madam, Dr. Jessies wants you upstairs.

BLANCHE . Oh . . . I'll come at once. (*Quickly exiting*) Good-bye, Linda. I'll ring you.

[She goes off.]

LINDA (*to* HESTER) . Oh, Hester, what a tamasha !

HESTER . Yes, indeed, my lady.

[LINDA goes out. HESTER makes some minor adjustments about the room. KIM and JOAN return.]

KIM : Where's mother, Hester ?

HESTER : She's just gone upstairs, Mr. Kim. Lady Maddox has gone.

KIM : I know. We just met her.

HESTER : Are you wet, Miss Joan ?

JOAN : No, it's stopped raining.

HESTER : You ought to be excited, Mr. Kim.

KIM : Excited ? Do I look excited ?

HESTER (*shaking out his coat, with comforting assurance*) : Oh, don't you worry, Mr. Kim. Why, in an hour's time, you'll be wondering why you were in such a fuss.

[*She goes out.*]

KIM (*with sudden tension*) : Will it take another hour ?

[*He turns to JOAN, who has sat down on the sofa.*]

Will it, Joan ?

JOAN : I shouldn't think so, but . . . sometimes it takes a long time.

KIM (*a little wildly*) : Oh, yes, I know ! *Lots* of things ! ! What I want to know is . . . *what* ?

[*JOAN just looks at him, rather distressed.*]

(*Contrite*) Oh, I'm sorry, Joan. I'm behaving very badly, I'm afraid.

JOAN : I don't mind. (*Smiles at him.*) I came over here to be a buffer for you. I expect Hester was right. In another hour we will all be wondering why we were so worried.

KIM : Well, Linda's gone. That's something !

[*He commences to walk about the room.*]

JOAN : She is a little trying, but you mustn't be hard on her, Kim. Don't you see, she's just a lonely old woman, with no family of her own, and she doesn't want to feel left out of it all. . . .

KIM : Oh, I suppose so ; still it's just like her to

come over here nosing around. As if she knew anything about babies. She couldn't even keep cats !

[JOAN *laughs*.

She couldn't ! They all died on her in hundreds, out of sheer ennui.

JOAN (*having got him to talk*) : What was her husband like ?

KIM : Hardly remember him. (*Laughs.*) He died on her early, too. (*Laughs.*) She probably wore him out in their first giddy weeks of marriage. (*Pause, and he smiles contemplatively.*) It's odd, isn't it, to think of people like Aunt Linda, capable of passion, and things like that ?

JOAN (*laughing*) : Yes.

KIM : Just imagine old Linda ! . . . I bet she was an old tigress in a taxi . . . or, rather, a hansom.

JOAN : Kim ! (*Laughs.*) There, you're feeling better now.

KIM (*doggedly reverting to his mood*) : No, I'm not really. I'm feeling worse than ever.

[*He crosses to the window.*

JOAN : I'm just as glad David and Judith aren't here.

KIM (*wheeling suddenly*) : They're not coming, are they ?

JOAN (*reassuringly*) : I shouldn't think so.

KIM (*petulantly*) : It's a wonder to me all South Kensington isn't here. Why the devil people can't leave us alone, I don't know ! It's our business, isn't it ? No one else's !

JOAN (*soothingly*) : Yes, dear. It's all right. . . .

KIM (*desperately*) : Oh, Joan, *why* doesn't it happen ? It *must* have, by now. . . .

[*The door opens and BLANCHE enters. She quietly closes the door. Her face is mask-like.*

(*Eagerly*) Well ?

[*BLANCHE gives him a flickering smile. KIM is very excited. He realises it is finished, and the relief blinds him to any peculiarity in BLANCHE.*

BLANCHE (*almost avoiding his gaze, and looking at JOAN*) : Dr. Jeffries would like you to go up, dear.

KIM : Oh, mother !

[*He hugs her with relief. BLANCHE clutches him. He mistakes her obvious emotion for that of relief. BLANCHE stares straight over his shoulder at JOAN, who stares back, fascinated. KIM brushes his eyes.*

Poor old mother. Don't cry, darling. It's been even worse for you than me. (*Laughs lightly.*) Oh, Joan, isn't it wonderful ! We don't have to wait any more !

BLANCHE (*quietly, and breaking away from him*) : Go upstairs, dear.

[*He bounds to the door. He suddenly pauses and boyishly swings back round the door. BLANCHE has her back to him.*

KIM : Oh, I say. Is it a boy, or a girl ?

BLANCHE : A . . . girl.

[*He gives a sudden exultant laugh, says, "Oh, Mary Lou," and bounds off, and up the stairs. BLANCHE and JOAN remain looking at each other.*

JOAN (*breathlessly*) : What . . . what . . . has happened ? Something has ?

[*BLANCHE automatically sits down. For a moment she is unable to speak. JOAN crosses to her and sits at her feet. She clutches her knees. She almost shakes her, searching her face.*

JOAN : Oh, Mrs. Oldham . . . tell me . . . something has happened ?

[*BLANCHE looks at her. She strokes her head.*

The baby's dead ?

BLANCHE : No. The baby's all right. It's . . . it's . . . Mary Lou.

JOAN (*terrified*) : She's . . .

BLANCHE (*nodding*) : She . . . she . . . just couldn't stand . . . up to it.

JOAN : Oh, my God !

[*Realising it, she breaks into a fit of sobbing. She suddenly controls herself.*]

But . . . but . . . you sent him up there . . . ?

BLANCHE : Yes. I sent him up. It was cowardly, I know . . . but . . . I couldn't tell him, here like this. It happened suddenly. Dr. Jeffries knows best how to do it. I couldn't.

JOAN : Poor Kim. Poor darling Kim. (*She looks at BLANCHE.*) It'll break him. It'll break him . . . completely.

[*BLANCHE shakes her head. She gazes straight in front of her.*]

But it will !

BLANCHE (*controlled now, and with a growing determination*) : We mustn't let it !

[*They remain looking at each other. HESTER enters with a tray and coffee.*]

HESTER : I've made you some coffee, madam. I thought you might like some.

BLANCHE : Oh, thank you, Hester. That was kind of you.

HESTER (*crossing the room, and pleasantly cheerful*) : You need something. All this waiting.

[*She places the coffee on the table. She looks up, sensing the feeling in the room.*]

BLANCHE : Hester . . .

HESTER : Yes, madam ?

BLANCHE : You . . . haven't been . . . upstairs . . .

HESTER : No, madam, not yet. I was just going to take them up some coffee in a moment.

BLANCHE : You'd better know, Hester. Mary Lou . . . (*she has difficulty*) . . . has . . . has . . . gone, Hester. . . .

HESTER (*realising it*) : Oh, madam . . .

BLANCHE (*nods*) : Yes.

[HESTER makes a sudden jerky movement towards BLANCHE. She touches her shoulder and draws back. She hesitates what to do, turns suddenly, and leaves the room.]

HESTER (*with genuine emotion, as she goes through the door*) : Oh . . . poor Mr. Kim . .

BLANCHE (*to JOAN, and carrying straight on*) : He'll be down directly, dear, and we must manage him. This is going to be very dreadful for Kim. I . . . I . . . don't quite know how to deal with him. . . . She never knew. Her heart just stopped and she just went out . . . like that. . .

[The door slowly opens. They turn. KIM is standing there, his expression one of baffled misery. He looks at them dazedly, and then slowly crosses the room to BLANCHE. She puts out her hand, which he grasps. He stands quite still, his back to the audience. No one speaks . . . and]

THE CURTAIN FALLS

SCENE II

SCENE : *The same. BLANCHE's room. It is one year later, and the time is about ten-thirty p.m.*

Seated at a bridge-table left, C., are BLANCHE, LINDA, DAVID, and JUDITH. They are finishing a rubber of "family bridge." All are in evening clothes, but BLANCHE is not in black. She is wearing a soft, charming frock of some subdued material.

The wireless, turned down, is playing softly in the background. (The wireless machine is the only new addition to the room.) They play for a moment in silence. It is for BLANCHE to follow suit. Her thoughts are not on her game, and there is a slight hold-up. DAVID looks at her with a hint of impatience. BLANCHE absently contemplates her cards, not realising it is her turn.

DAVID (*a little exasperated*) : Go on, dear ! Play something !

BLANCHE : Oh, I'm sorry, dear. Is it me ? (*She looks at her hand, and then at the cards already on the table*) Now . . . don't rush me. I must think about this. . . .

[She takes a card from her hand, and holds it, undecided. They all wait. She places it on the table rather triumphantly.]

DAVID (*a little tired*) : It's a heart led, mother.

BLANCHE (*called to task*) : Oh So it is. Can I take that back ? (*She does so, and again consults her hand.*) Well . . . (*she plays another card*) . . . that's all I can do !

[She looks up, smiling. They briskly finish off the game. LINDA is dummy and DAVID's partner. BLANCHE is playing with JUDITH.]

DAVID (*pleased*) : 'Fraid we've got you !

[BLANCHE nods resignedly. LINDA, practically, takes up her score-card.]

LINDA (*briskly*) : That's game and rubber to us

BLANCHE (*to JUDITH*) : I'm sorry, Judith dear, but you see I couldn't stop them getting that lead into dummy, until it was too late. You see that, don't you? (*Pause.*) It was silly of me, but I shouldn't have led out that king.

JUDITH (*smiling rather fatuously*) : Oh, it doesn't matter a bit.

BLANCHE : Still it *was* silly of me. I must look that up. I bought a book the other day by this man Cuthbertson.

[DAVID and LINDA laugh. DAVID is busy with the score.]

DAVID (*adding up*) : That's . . . five hundred to us for the rubber . . . and let me see . . . (*takes BLANCHE's card*) . . . yes . . . you got that there . . . yes, that seems right. . . . '*He continues to finish his adding up.*' I make you seven hundred down, old dear ! (*To BLANCHE.*)

BLANCHE : Oh, but we can't be ! Let me see. (*Takes card.*) Yes . . . yes . . . that does seem right.

LINDA (*busily*) : It's quite right. I make it the same.

BLANCHE : Oh, well. I'll take your word for it. I hate adding.

LINDA : We came out of that rather nicely, David. What were we playing for ?

BLANCHE : I never play for more than sixpence.

DAVID (*heavily jocular*) : Oh. We always play for half a crown !

BLANCHE (*laughing*) : Well, it's sixpence this time, my dears. That's three and sixpence I owe you, Linda.

LINDA : Yes.

JUDITH : I'll pay you, David.

DAVID (*with a short laugh*) : All right. Don't suppose I'll ever see it. Turn off that wireless, will you, mother ?

[BLANCHIE gets up and does so. She crosses to desk for her bag.

JUDITH : David didn't really mean we always play for half a crown.

LINDA : I should hope not. You can lose a very great deal at sixpence.

[LINDA gets up and moves to armchair. She sits down.

JUDITH : I suppose you could. As a matter of fact, I've only played contract about three times before. (*Laughs.*) I thought I wouldn't tell you, though.

LINDA (*amiably*) : You didn't have to, my dear.

BLANCHIE (*crossing to LINDA with money*) : Is that all, Judith ? You'd very soon pick it up. You ought to go to Miss Dobie, dear, and have some lessons. She's *so* good. I often go.

DAVID : She must be very good, mother. Anyway, don't encourage her. We don't want two bridge fiends in the family.

BLANCHIE (*laughs, and pays LINDA the money*) : There's three and six, Linda.

LINDA (*collecting*) : Thank you. Shall we have another rubber ?

BLANCHIE : Just as you like, dear. It's quite early.

DAVID (*looking at his watch*) : I don't think we'd better, mother. I have rather an early day tomorrow. Can't burn the candle at both ends, you know.

BLANCHIE : You're very wise, dear. That's what I'm always telling Kim. (*She rings the bell.*) What would you like to drink, Linda ?

LINDA : I . . . don't think I'll have anything else, Blanche.

BLANCHIE : Oh, but you must have something. It's so chilly to-night. Some port, or something. I've got some that's rather good.

LINDA : Well . . . (*laughs*) . . . perhaps it would be nice.

BLANCHE (*returning to the circle*) : Of course !

DAVID : Kim seems much better, mother.

BLANCHE : He's very well, dear. He's frightfully busy, which is a good thing

DAVID : You know, mother, I'm still inclined to think it's a pity he hasn't taken up one of the professions.

BLANCHE . Isn't architecture a profession ?

DAVID : Well, not like medicine or law. You know what I mean.

BLANCHE . No, I don't think I do.

LINDA : I still wish he could have gone up to Oxford.

DAVID : Oh, good Lord ! Don't let's go into all that again.

BLANCHE : I don't mind a bit his not going to Oxford. I don't think any of you have any right to criticise. He's busy and occupied, and Gordon Vickers is very pleased with him. He thinks he shows great promise. He told me.

DAVID : Well, I suppose he wouldn't bother with him if he wasn't any good.

BLANCHE : Of course he wouldn't. He knows. He simply flew through that exam. Besides, David, do try and realise what he's been through. I know—all that it meant. I was only too relieved when he flung himself so wholeheartedly into this work. He loves it, and is happy doing it, and that's all I care about. I can't bear to feel he's unhappy. What is the good of trying to force him to be a doctor, or a lawyer, or something, if he doesn't want to do it ?

DAVID : If you're not interested in what you are doing, I don't suppose you'll ever be likely to make much of a success of it.

BLANCHE : Well, of course, that's what I *mean* !

[HESTER *enters with port and whisky.*

Put them here, Hester. (*Indicating small table.*)

HESTER : Mr. Kim's in, madam.

BLANCHE (*pleased*) : Oh, is he ? Tell him to come in here, Hester.

HESTER : Yes, madam. (*She smiles at BLANCHE.*)
He's just run upstairs to have a look at Baby.

BLANCHE : Oh. I hope he doesn't wake her up.

HESTER (*going to door*) : Oh, he won't do that.

BLANCHE : David, see to the drinks.

[DAVID *crosses to drink table.*

JUDITH (*gushingly*) : How is the baby ?

BLANCHE : Sweet ! She's growing so.

JUDITH : I'd love to have a peep at her. May I ?

BLANCHE : Yes, dear, do . . . but be careful, won't you, because Nanny regards her as entirely her property. I have to be awfully careful what I do.

[DAVID *hands LINDA port.*

DAVID : It's nearly a year now, isn't it, mother ?

BLANCHE : Yes, dear . . . (*quietly*) . . . nearly a year. I find it hard to believe, but there it is.

LINDA (*sipping port*) : You're quite right, Blanche. It is good !

BLANCHE : Isn't it ! I had it given me. (*To DAVID*) Just a very little for me, dear.

[DAVID *hands BLANCHE a small glass of port.*

Thank you. Won't you have some, Judith ?

JUDITH : I . . . don't think I will . . . thanks.

BLANCHE : Won't you, dear ?

[DAVID *continues to help himself. JUDITH smiles and shakes her head. They sip their port. The door opens, and KIM comes in. He wears a dinner-jacket.*

KIM Hullo, David ' Drinking again ?

DAVID : What do you think I'm doing ?

KIM (*laughing*) All right, old boy, joke over '
Hullo, Aunt Linda (*Crosses and kisses her*)

BLANCHE Nice dinner, dear ?

KIM · Yes Quite fun (*He stoops and kisses her*)
How wah ya ? I left early. And . how's
Judith ? (*Crosses and kisses her*)

JUDITH : Very well, thank you, Kim.

KIM · Good (*He turns to BLANCHE with a touch of pride.*) She's looking quite marvellous ' All the
clothes off, as usual '

BLANCHE Oh, she is naughty ' I hope she
wasn't sucking her thumb '

KIM (*laughing*) She was, but I took it out.

BLANCHE It's such a bad habit she's got into
It will spoil the shape of her mouth It's quite
perfect now

JUDITH (*to BLANCHE*) She's awfully like you,
isn't she ?

BLANCHE · Kim 'hinks she is . (*to KIM*) .
don't you, dear ?

KIM Just like you at her age, darling Did you
suck your thumb ?

BLANCHE I expect I did.

KIM · She is a very strong individual per-
sonality, Judith Very busy, being just Miss
Louise Oldham

LINDA I suppose the next thing will be, she'll
be having her coming-out party '

[*All laugh*

KIM May I have a drink ?

BLANCHE 'Course, dear Have one.

DAVID (*with mild disapproval*) Whisky and
soda ?

KIM : Yes, please

LINDA (to KIM) : Was this a school dinner you've been to ?

KIM : Old Boys'. We are trying to have it every year.

JUDITH : Where did you go ?

KIM (*with drink*) : We were going to the Berkeley, but we ended up in Soho.

JUDITH : Oh, fun ! David and I went there the other night I always think it's fascinating. Where was it we went, David ? A little foreign place

DAVID (*pompously*) The Santa Lucia

JUDITH : Yes. It was really Bohemian. Like Naples. We saw Evelyn Laye

KIM (*continuing*) : We nearly went to a show, but it was too late. The others are still out beating up the town. It's just as well I went, as only six turned up

BLANCHE : Oh, how naughty of them ! Why didn't you go off with the others ?

KIM : Oh . . . (*laughs, and then thoughtfully*) . . . I don't know. I thought I'd come home. (*Laughs.*) It mightn't have been good for me, darling.

BLANCHE (*comprehendingly*) : Oh . . .

KIM : You see . . . I'm an old married man.

[*They are all rather quiet.*]

(*A little tensely*) Still, it *was* rather good to get off and see some chaps again. I haven't been around much lately, have I ?

BLANCHE : Not half enough ! We'll do some theatres next week. There are several things I'd like to see. Linda, more port ?

LINDA : Good heavens, no ! I seem to have been drinking ever since I came here. I've got to get home !

[KIM slowly sips his whisky. The telephone suddenly rings.]

BLANCHE : Answer it, David.

DAVID : Hullo ? Yes. Yes ; do you want to speak to her ? Yes, she's here. Just one minute. (*Aside*) For you, mother

BLANCHE (*getting up*) : Who is it, dear ?

DAVID : Joan Trevor.

BLANCHE : Oh ! (*At telephone*) Hullo ? Hullo, Joan ? (*Smiles*) How art you, dear ? That's right. Oh . . . that was David. Um . . . we've been having a family party, and playing bridge. Yes, dear, he's here. He's just come in. He's been to a school . . . (*correcting herself* . . . or . . . Old Boys' dinner (*She glances across at KIM*) What ? Oh, but that sounds lovely. No . . . of course not ! No, I don't see the slightest reason why he shouldn't. Wait a minute, dear, and I'll ask him. (*She pauses, and then to KIM*) Kim, it's Joan. Some friends of hers are having a little party, and are all going on to the Savoy. They want another man, and she wondered if you'd like to go. . . .

KIM (*brightening*) : Oh.

LINDA : Dancing ?

BLANCHE : Yes, apparently, dancing. (*To KIM*) Come and talk to her.

[*She holds out the receiver. He crosses to the telephone.*

KIM (*at telephone*) : Hullo, Joan darling ? What's all this about ? Um . . . yes . . . I see . . . (*pause*) . . . yes . . . I'd love to.

[BLANCHE *smiles*.

I'll come if you promise to look after me. Shall I meet you there ? Oh, no, don't bother to do that. What ? Oh, I see. You're at their flat ? Well, of course, if you want to. Um. Come in here and have a drink. Yes, I'll be ready. Yes

. . . in about five minutes or so. That's fine, then. I'll be ready. Yes, really. I'd love to. (*He hangs up and faces them.*)

BLANCHE (*to KIM*) Nice of her to think of you.

KIM (*with a short laugh*) . Yes I'd rather like to go. You don't mind, do you, mother ? I mean the Savoy, and everything . . . ?

BLANCHE . Of course not I think it would be lovely for you to go. You'll have to change into your other coat.

KIM (*a little pre-occupied*) . Yes . . . I will She'll be round here in a few minutes. She's just near by.

BLANCHE . Well, run up and slip on your tails, old man It will probably smell of moth-balls, but that can't be helped Put some eau-de-Cologne on it, and bring down a clothes-brush, and I'll give you a dust before you go. There's one in the hall

KIM (*smiling at her*) . The recluse . . . goes to his first party !

BLANCHE (*patting him*) Nice for you, darling I'm so glad !

KIM (*stooping and kissing her suddenly*) : Are you ?

BLANCHE . There are some clean white ties in the top drawer

KIM (*going*) Right, darling

[*KIM goes out*]

There is a pause.

LINDA . Blanche ?

BLANCHE . What ?

LINDA . Don't you think it's a little soon for him to be going to a place like the Savoy ?

BLANCHE . No, Linda Why ?

LINDA (*shrugs*) Oh, I don't know. It just depends on how you look at these things.

DAVID : He seems to want to go. This dinner, I suppose, and a lot of would-be young bloods smelling a cork !

BLANCHE (*with growing irritation*) · Don't be so stupid, David. He's dressed, and everything, and I'm glad he's going. It's only a quiet little party with Joan and her friends. She's devoted to Kim, and has done more for him than anyone else.

DAVID : More than you ?

BLANCHE : Far more than me. I'm his mother. Surely you see that he must have young companionship. He's only twenty, now.

DAVID (*petulantly*) Yes, I know, I know, but . . .

LINDA (*cutting in*) : Well, I don't know. You always did have rather an odd way of looking at things, Blanche. I quite see that the boy needn't be expected to stay at home every night. *That* rests with his *own* feelings, but can't they go . . . to the pictures, or somewhere a little less obtrusive and ostentatious ?

BLANCHE : At eleven o'clock in the evening, Linda !

LINDA Well, I don't necessarily mean to-night. He's been out once already.

BLANCHE : Yes, for the first time for about a year, except for one or two theatres with me. It hasn't been an easy year, Linda.

DAVID : Now, don't get upset, mother dear. He's apparently going, so let's leave it at that !

BLANCHE : I should think so !

[HESTER enters.]

HESTER : Miss Trevor is here, madam.

BLANCHE : Oh . . . (*turns, and JOAN comes into the room*) . . . there you are. Come in, Joan.

[JOAN wears a very attractive evening frock and wrap. She looks extremely pretty]

JOAN (*impulsively to BLANCHE*) : How are you ?
(*Kisses her*) How do you do, Lady Maddox.
How are you ?

LINDA (*sitting in chair*) : How do you do. How
are the goldfish ?

JOAN · Oh . . . (*laughs*) . . . I'm afraid they've
given me up. They were always dying.

LINDA · Oh

BLANCHE (*indicating DAVID and JUDITH*) : You
know these two, don't you ?

JOAN (*spontaneously*) · Of course. How do you do

JUDITH (*shaking hand*) · How do you do

DAVID · How do you do. I'm afraid it's . . .
hail and farewell. We're just going.

JUDITH (*to DAVID*) · I must just take a peep at
Baby first. You come too, David. (*To LINDA*)
Won't you come, Aunt Linda ?

LINDA (*rising*) · Yes, I think I will.

BLANCHE · Do be careful if you all go up. I don't
want her wakened.

LINDA : Don't be ridiculous, Blanche. Merely
looking at the child won't wake her. (*To*
JOAN) Are you coming ?

JOAN : Don't you think there are enough of you ?
I'll stay here and talk to Mrs. Oldham.

BLANCHE · Yes. That's right.

[DAVID, JUDITH, and LINDA go out.]

(*To JOAN*) Kim'll be down in a minute. He's
just changing his coat.

JOAN : I thought, if you didn't really mind, it
might be a good idea if he came out to-night.
I know he's been out once, and it's late, but it
just happened this way. . . .

BLANCHE (*crossing to sofa and sitting*) : Well, it's more fun when things just happen (*Laughs*) I almost wish I were twenty-one, and then I could come too

JOAN : Why don't you ? We'd love you to.

BLANCHE : What ? (*Hesitates*) Oh, no, dear I'm far too tired We've been sitting here playing bridge but . . . I love you and Kim too
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[*The door opens, and KIM comes in. He is in dress clothes, and carries a clothes-brush*

Oh, here he is

KIM : Just passed the pilgrimage on the stairs
Hullo, Joan darling I'm nearly ready Mother dear, you said you'd give me a brush.

JOAN (*taking brush*) Here, I'll do you

[*Proceeds to brush him down*

You look nice in evening clothes Like a diplomat !

KIM No, dear. Like an architect

BLANCHE (*watching them from the sofa*) Like an actor !

KIM : Heavens, darling, I'll have to get my hair cut

JOAN (*still brushing*) Nice, anyway I want you to look nice to-night

[*She brushes his pocket*

Hullo, what's this ?

[*She feels in his breast-pocket, and takes out three moth-balls.*

Moth-balls !

KIM : Oh.

BLANCHE : Oh, what did I tell you Give them to me.

[*They all laugh. JOAN gives them to BLANCHE, who gets up and puts them in a drawer in desk. She returns to the sofa.*

KIM : Do I pass ?

JOAN : I think they'll let you in.

KIM : Good. Have a drink ?

JOAN : Oh, but we'll get lots later.

KIM : Never mind. We're beginning a different party, now. *Our party !*

[*He pours out two small glasses of port, and hands one to JOAN. The door opens, and DAVID comes in hurriedly, in his coat and scarf, preparatory to leaving. He crosses rapidly to ELANCHE. JUDITH follows him.*

DAVID : We're going now, mother. The baby looks fine.

BLANCHE (*rising from sofa*) : Oh, must you . . . dear ?

DAVID (*definitely*) : Yes. Good night. (*Kisses her.*)

BLANCHE : Good night, dear.

DAVID : Look after yourself.

BLANCHE : I will. Good night, dear. It's been lovely having you both. Good night, Judith. (*Kisses her.*) I'll come and see you off. Where's Aunt Linda ?

DAVID : She's up there, talking to Nanny. She says she'll walk home. We've said good night.

BLANCHE : Oh . . .

JUDITH (*they are all at door*) : You must come and dine with us one night next week. We've got a new cook. She's learning ravioli.

[*They all three go out into hall.*

BLANCHE (*off*) : That would be lovely, dear. I should like that.

[*KIM and JOAN are left alone.*

JOAN : You don't mind me dragging you out ?

KIM : You're not *dragging* me out !

JOAN : They're fun, and I've always wanted you to meet them.

KIM (*looking at her*) : I'll love them.

JOAN : I've always known them, and they're living in town now. . . .

KIM : I wish you'd stop apologising ! I haven't danced for such a long time, you mustn't mind if I tread on your toes.

JOAN : You . . . like it, don't you ?

KIM : Love it. (*Suddenly*) It's sweet of you, Joan. I'm going to enjoy myself.

JOAN : I'm going to . . . too.

KIM (*looks at her for an instant, and then suddenly*) : Drink that up. They're not waiting outside, are they ?

JOAN : No. They dropped me here and have gone on. I thought it would be better for you to meet them there.

KIM : You think of everything, don't you ?

[*There is a pause. He looks at her, JOAN suddenly holding up her glass.*]

JOAN : Well . . . ?

KIM : Here's to our first party . . . together. (*Laughs.*) It is that, isn't it ?

JOAN : Here's to it !

[*They both drink their port. She turns and looks about the room.*]

You've got a wireless. That's new, isn't it ?

KIM : Yes. We had it put in. Mother and I sit and listen to it on long winter evenings.

JOAN : Bad for you !

KIM : What ? Wireless ?

JOAN : Long winter evenings.

KIM : Perhaps they are. Come on. Let's go.

[BLANCHE returns.

(Turning) Seen them off?

BLANCHE : Yes. They've gone. Oughtn't you two to go? It's getting late. (Pats JOAN.) So glad to see you, Joan dear.

JOAN : Lovely seeing you both, too.

KIM : Good night, mother dear. Don't wait up.

BLANCHE : I certainly won't ! Good night. Have a nice party.

KIM : Good night. (Kisses her.)

BLANCHE : Good night, my dears. Look after yourselves.

[They go to the door. JOAN goes out. KIM turns and comes back to her.

KIM : Mother ?

BLANCHE : What, dear ?

KIM : You don't mind . . . me going ?

BLANCHE (*completely reassuring*) : I'm glad you're going. Good night, my dearest. (She kisses him again.)

KIM : Darling mother.

[He rather bounds for the door.

(To JOAN, off) : Come on. . . .

JOAN (off) : Come along. Put your coat on.

[BLANCHE stands in the doorway to the hall. KIM is heard to call gaily :

KIM (off) : Hey !! Taxi !

[The front door slams. BLANCHE closes the door and crosses to the windows back L. She draws aside the curtains and looks down into the street. She waves. LINDA enters. She is wearing an evening wrap, and carrying some magazines.

LINDA (pausing) : What are you doing, Blanche ?

BLANCHE (*turning*): Waving, dear. They've just gone. (*She allows the curtains to fall back into place.*) Where have you been?

LINDA: Talking to Nanny. About the baby, mostly. I borrowed these. (*Holding up magazines*) They were up in the nursery, and they often have very good recipes in them. I find it so difficult to think of anything new to tell cook for meals.

BLANCHE: Oh, I was going to send them to a hospital, but you have them, dear, by all means.

LINDA: Well, they may as well come to me first.

[*They both sit down.*]

(*After a pause*) Well . . . I see you let him go?

BLANCHE: There was no question of "letting," Linda. I never had any intention of stopping him.

LINDA: I suppose you think you know best.

BLANCHE: Linda! I *want* him to go out! I want him to be young. I don't want him to become prematurely old, just because something . . . something . . . almost too sad for him to realise . . . came into his life at nineteen. He's getting over it now, and I'm glad. If he had been older, it wouldn't have been so easy. I won't let it spoil his whole life. Don't you see? I haven't let it, Linda, and I'm not going to. These last few months, Kim and I have been closer than we've ever been before, and that mite . . . (*she glances in the direction of the nursery upstairs*) . . . upstairs . . . has helped us through. But . . . he needs young companionship, Linda. (*Pause, and she smiles a little sadly.*) He won't always . . . have me.

LINDA (*a little moved*): Perhaps . . . you're right.

BLANCHE: I know you've often thought it was all my fault, for shutting my eyes.

LINDA (*making an involuntary sympathetic movement*

towards her with her hand) : No, Blanche. I never said so.

BLANCHE (*not unkindly*) : No, dear . . . perhaps you never *said* so. It's not been so easy to keep going. You've often thought me frivolous . . . and stupid. It isn't *that*. I'm not old, Linda. I refuse to call myself . . . old.

LINDA (*quietly*) : None of us are as young as we were, Blanche.

BLANCHE (*with growing insistency*) : I'm fifty-one. Sometimes . . . (*hesitates*) . . . I feel a hundred and fifty-one . . . but . . . it's no good doing that ! I've often wondered . . . if it's foolish of me to keep up this house. It isn't just because I'm pig-headed and can afford it. It's because it's part of all the things dear to me in life, Linda, and I belong to it. Some day . . . someone else will live here, and then it won't matter any more. This house . . . is full of . . . intangible things, which, if I left, would cease to exist, because they belong to *me*, and to no one else, and I won't let them go. They're *mine* ! (*She falters a little, and looks about the room*) Harry and I . . . we were . . . happy here. Kim was only nine when he died. They came and told me, here, that Tony . . . my Tony . . . had . . . had . . . shot himself ; and then, only a year ago, Mary Lou, who was like my own daughter . . . But . . . I've gone *on*, Linda ! I've had to. For Kim. (*Thoughtfully*) You see, it's a much more violent world to-day than the one in which we grew up. I tell myself there must be dozens of families who have far less to fight with than I. Those who were in the War, for instance. My boys missed that, and I'm thankful. I'm one of the lucky ones ! I've got David and Judith, and adorable grandchildren, and I've got Kim, and that baby . . . and I like being here, where I've lived it all. . . .

[LINDA remains on the sofa, impressed.]

(*After a slight pause*) You see, Linda . . . grief . . . doesn't stay. We remember . . . and we grow !

LINDA (*quietly understanding*) : Yes, Blanche. Don't think I don't understand, dear ; I do. I admire you very much.

BLANCHE (*spontaneously pleased*) : That's nice, coming from you.

LINDA (*thoughtfully*) : You've had the courage to put things behind you

[BLANCHE smiles.

I suppose I've often seemed maddlesome and old fashioned. Living alone makes one like that. Yours is the only family I have, Blanche.

BLANCHE (*kindly*) I know that, dear

[*For a moment the two women regard each other in mutual understanding. BLANCHE suddenly gets up, with a change of mood. She laughs.*

We mustn't get morbid ! I'm going to put on the wireless.

[BLANCHE crosses to the radio. She switches it on and stands beside it. LINDA gets up from the sofa and watches her. The machine warms up.

LINDA : Isn't it working ?

BLANCHE : It has to warm up !

LINDA (*not understanding*) : Oh. (*More briskly, as the music commences to come through*) I must go home. It's a curious thing, Blanche, but I feel I know you better to-night than I ever have before. We have never really . . . talked . . . before.

BLANCHE (*turning to her*) : I don't think we ever have, dear. There doesn't ever seem to have been time. (*Smiles, and pats LINDA.*) I won't do it again.

LINDA : But I enjoyed it ! It was time, dear, we got acquainted.

[BLANCHE laughs, and the music swells in intensity. It is a dance orchestra. BLANCHE stands listening, and then, suddenly, to LINDA :

BLANCHE : Listen ! (*Happily*) That's the Savoy !

LINDA (*with sudden curiosity*) Is it ?

BLANCHE (*happily*) . I'm sure it is !

[*She hastily crosses to desk and picks up a copy of the "Radio Times."* She consults the announcements.

Yes. Isn't that nice Linda ? It is ! They'll be dancing to that. (*She vaguely moves her hand in time with the music*) It brings it all so close. Right into this room

[*They both listen for a moment*

LINDA : It's very loud !

[BLANCHE turns the dial on the machine until the music is very faintly heard.

That's better (*Then, to BLANCHE*) Good night. Don't sit up too late. You're very tired.

BLANCHE . I won't Good night. (*Kisses her*) Oh . . . don't forget your papers.

LINDA (*she has*) Oh . . . (*She collects them from the sofa.*) Don't come out. I'm going to walk home, slowly It's rather a lovely night.

BLANCHE . It's very cold I should take a taxi.

LINDA : I prefer to walk Good night.

BLANCHE . Good night, dear Don't slam the front door !

LINDA (*brightly, as she goes out*) . I won't.

[BLANCHE stands C. She turns, and listens to the music coming dreamily from the radio. It is a slow waltz-blues number. She takes a few vague, almost gay, floating dance-steps to the waltz time, hesitates and sits down on the sofa, waving her hand in time to the rhythm. She pauses, alone with her thoughts, and smiles, as

THE CURTAIN FALLS

THE MASK OF VIRTUE

Carl Sternheim

THE MASK OF VIRTUE

*A Comedy
in Three Acts*

Adapted from
DIE MARQUISE VON ARCIS

English version by
ASHLEY DUKES

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*This play is the property of Sydney Carroll, 18 Charing Cross
Road, London W.C. 2, to whom all applications are to be
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Curtis Brown Ltd., 6 Henrietta Street, W.C. 2*

ADAPTOR'S NOTE

It should be said at once that *The Mask of Virtue* owes everything to the initiative of Mr. Sydney Carroll, who commissioned this version of Carl Sternheim's *Die Marquise von Arcis* (a drama itself based on a story by Diderot) and presented it under a title chosen by himself. The distinguished German author will wish to join with me in this acknowledgment. I have personally to thank Herr Sternheim for consenting to the minor changes that have been made in his work.

The play was produced at the Ambassadors Theatre, London, on May 15th, 1935, with the following cast :

<i>Marquise de Pommeclaye</i>	JEANNE DE CASALIS
<i>Marquis d'Arcy</i>	FRANK CILLIER
<i>Madame Duquesnoy</i>	LADY TREE
<i>Henriette Duquesnoy</i>	VIVIEN LEIGH
<i>Footman</i>	DOUGLAS MATTHEWS

Producer · MAXWELL WRAY

Designer · PHILIP GOUGH

Great Britain is the latest, though certainly not the last, country in which *Die Marquise von Arcis* meets with stage success.

ASHLEY DUKES

PERSONS

THE MARQUIS D'ARCY

MME DE POMMERAYE, Marchioness in her
own right

MME DUQUESNOY

HENRIETTE DUQUESNOY

FOOTMEN AND SERVANTS

The action passes in Paris, about 1760

ACT I

SCENE I

Mme de Pommeraye's drawing-room. Late afternoon.

The scene is empty when the curtain rises. Then a FOOTMAN opens the doors and admits MME DE POMMERAYE.

MME DE POMMERAYE : Not here yet ?

FOOTMAN : Not yet, my lady

MME DE POMMERAYE : After the Marquis has paid his visit, I shall expect two strangers. Ladies of course.

FOOTMAN : Yes, my lady.

MME DE POMMERAYE : You will not admit them while he is here, or announce their names.

FOOTMAN : Very good, my lady.

MME DE POMMERAYE : Now you may see if his carriage is in sight.

FOOTMAN : Thank you, my lady

[FOOTMAN goes.]

MME DE POMMERAYE (*alone*) : Six o'clock already ! He comes every day later and later. And always with fresh excuses. But this day five years ago—yes, he will need a special excuse for lateness on such an occasion ! Of course he will find it, trust him for that. He fails in many things, but not in tact. How gracefully he will give the world to understand that Mme de Pommeraye, marchioness in her own right, is a past episode like all the others ! Am I to wait for that ? To be told not in words, but with a gesture and a smile, that I have missed my cue and failed to quit the scene in time ? Never while I live ! I mean to be beforehand with him. Too often I have sworn it to myself ; now it

shall be ! He shall be the one to miss his cue !
I am ready for him !

[*The FOOTMAN throws open the doors again.*

FOOTMAN : The Marquis d'Arcy !

[*The MARQUIS enters, bouquet in hand, and the FOOTMAN goes.*

MARQUIS : My dearest friend, your goodness overwhelms me. I am dumb with gratitude. These alone shall be allowed to speak. (*He hands her the flowers.*)

MME DE POMMERAYE : But why—— ?

MARQUIS : The fifth of *May*

MME DE POMMERAYE : The fifth—— ?

MARQUIS : Our own anniversary.

MME DE POMMERAYE : But of course, I had forgotten ! What enchanting roses !

MARQUIS : I had to run through Paris for an hour to find them.

MME DE POMMERAYE : And what a perfect excuse you find for lateness ! But your health !

MARQUIS : Hum—my doctor is satisfied.

MME DE POMMERAYE : I should prefer you to agree with him.

MARQUIS : Of course, I feel well enough for a man of my years.

MME DE POMMERAYE : But—is there a but ?

MARQUIS : One always wishes to feel better.

MME DE POMMERAYE : Even after a past like yours ?

MARQUIS : A former past, if you please. Now blotted out by five years of discretion.

MME DE POMMERAYE : Have they been entirely free from indulgences ?

MARQUIS (*bows*) : I have erred only in the best of company.

MME DE POMMERAYL : Now all the world seems to be erring. Have you observed that ?

MARQUIS : Yes, indeed. The life led by the nobility of France is fantastic—I should say monstrous.

MME DE POMMERAYL : So you say now. But once we could find no words to sing the praises of such freedom

MARQUIS : I grant you it is still fashionable. It even dazzles our tame philosophers, who approve every experiment in the art of living. An art, by the way, that never quite conceals the nature of their birth.

MME DE POMMERAYL : But you personally are less adventurous than before ?

MARQUIS : Every liberty, once it is admitted, grows wearisome. Liberty of morals most of all. You know there was a time when it amused me, like others, to cultivate an open mind. Our little circle of aristocracy had been closed too long. So we were pleased to admit the poets, the painters, the freethinkers and all the rabble following at their heels. Who could blame us ? We had long been wits and artists ourselves, in our own way. There was nothing in the government of life that we did not know and understand.

MME DE POMMERAYL : Except perhaps the emptiness of too much freedom

MARQUIS : Ah, my dear Mathilde, there you have it ! When you declined the offer of my hand, and accepted only a union of our passions in its place, what was the basis of our happiness ? Was it not a pride of distinction,

from the knowledge that we stood unique and alone above our fellows ?

MME DE POMMERAYE At that time we had no fellows, dear Marquis

MARQUIS But what is our situation to-day ? Now all the world lives its own life , and soon every shopkeeper will be pointing to his vulgar *liaison* with pride

MME DE POMMERAYE But surely the fact that we have imitators need not make our own relation foolish

MARQUIS Not foolish, Mathilde I never said that

MME DE POMMERAYE It seemed as though you meant it

MARQUIS If our affair had not been exceptional, it would have been a failure from the beginning Only our birth enabled us to make such a challenge The step did not prove our enlightenment—that was unnecessary—but our pride and independence of the mob I trust you agree with me ?

MME DE POMMERAYE Oh yes Perfectly

MARQUIS And now it is time to assert our position once again We are Paris, Paris is the world of elegance, and that world requires distinction above all Our duty is to give the lead

MME DE POMMERAYE That should be easy You are the friend and patron of all the genius of the day

MARQUIS Bah ! Reputations are what we make them, genius is talent with our seal upon it I ask no approval from demagogues who hawk their opinions at the street corner.

MME DE POMMERAYE So you wish every sentiment to be reserved as yours alone ?

MARQUIS : I share nothing I love with others.
Nor you, my dear Mathilde.

MME DE POMMERAYE : Am I the subject or the
object of that remark ?

MARQUIS : I am not trifling

MME DE POMMERAYE : Nor I. In fact I see that
for you the charm of our relationship lies in the
past. We were in love with one another, but
even more in love with ourselves

MARQUIS : I should hardly put it in that way.

MME DE POMMERAYE : In love with our gesture,
if you prefer it. Almost passionately we shut our
gates upon the mob and claimed a garden for
our own. And now they swarm along our foot-
paths and trample our precious flowers.
Perhaps your roses are all that remain to us.

MARQUIS : Mathilde, that goes too far !

MME DE POMMERAYE : Oh, I understand you
well enough !

MARQUIS : Then listen to me now

MME DE POMMERAYE : I am listening.

MARQUIS : I beg of you—let us escape the
commonplace together

MME DE POMMERAYE (*smiling*) : Do you propose
a pact of suicide ?

MARQUIS (*with ceremony*) : On this fifth anniver-
sary of our union, let me once more offer you
my hand.

MME DE POMMERAYE : And so accept what we
have scorned already ? No, that would be the
greatest commonplace of all ! Marriage is still
the refuge of the vast majority—a thought that
must fill you with rage. For both our sakes I
must decline.

MARQUIS : You have some other reason you will
not admit.

MME DE POMMERAYE : Perhaps we might look into ourselves more closely.

MARQUIS : I have not changed in the least.

MME DE POMMERAYE : No, with you the lover of five years ago may be the lover of to-day. But with me—or would you prefer me not to speak ?

MARQUIS : We agreed from the first to have no secrets from each other.

MME DE POMMERAYE : Then you must surely be conscious of some change on my side.

MARQUIS : I really observe nothing.

MME DE POMMERAYE : Do you not think I have lost some of my former liveliness ?

MARQUIS : Well, perhaps a little——

MME DE POMMERAYE : I find my appetite is not what it was.

MARQUIS : Indeed !

MME DE POMMERAYE : I sleep less soundly than I did.

MARQUIS : Really ?

MME DE POMMERAYE : I grow irritable in company.

MARQUIS : Surely not !

MME DE POMMERAYE : I even ask myself—are you as charming as ever ?

MARQUIS : Oh !

MME DE POMMERAYE : But of course I find you are.

MARQUIS : Hum— quite.

MME DE POMMERAYE : I have no private reason to complain of you—no social reproaches to make.

MARQUIS : I am glad to hear it.

MME DE POMMERAYE . And we agree that your own affection is no less

MARQUIS . Certainly

MME DE POMMERAYE . So that clearly the change of heart must be mine.

MARQUIS (*uneasy*) We may be making mountains out of molehills I have only tried to tell you that the world itself is coarsening our ideals.

MME DE POMMERAYE . You mean that with you this is not a personal question ?

MARQUIS : Hum—not at all A matter of principle

MME DE POMMERAYE . My dear friend, how fortunate you are !

MARQUIS : I beg your pardon ?

MME DE POMMERAYE . Must I be the first to speak ?

MARQUIS : What do you mean ?

MME DE POMMERAYE . Oh, if I tell you the truth, be frank and do not spare me !

MARQUIS . What truth ?

MME DE POMMERAYE . It is too clear that I am—that I have been—ah, the fact itself is misfortune enough without the shame of confessing it—

MARQUIS : What have you done ?

MME DE POMMERAYE . Nothing ! It is what is left undone that troubles me now ! I have not deceived you as other women may deceive—

MARQUIS : Thank you.

MME DE POMMERAYE . But one thing I cannot conceal—your friend of to-day is not the woman you have known.

MARQUIS : Mathilde !

MME DE POMMERAYE : No ! She has learned to value and respect you more highly than ever. She desires only to be worthy of you. But, vowing to look truth in the face, she must at length admit that passionate love is ended. (*She turns from him and covers her eyes.*) You are amazed, are you not ?

MARQUIS : Yes !

MME DE POMMERAYE : I know the discovery is dreadful, but we must face it together—you as well as I ! Now call me what you will, I deserve your reproaches—only do not call me hypocrite !

[*The MARQUIS falls on his knees before her.*]

MARQUIS : Mathilde ! Wonderful, godlike creature—unlike any other woman in the world ! How your sincerity touches my heart—it makes me ready to sink into the ground with shame ! How far I feel you raised above me, how well I see my own littleness ! So be it ! True to yourself, you have been the first to confess.

[*She lifts a corner of her handkerchief.*]

MME DE POMMERAYE : I ? The first ?

MARQUIS : You—while I still shuffled with excuses and tried to spare you. All the blame is mine, I take it freely. Nothing but your sublime candour could have dragged the truth from me.

MME DE POMMERAYE : Oh ! Oh !

MARQUIS : Now let me tell you—word for word your story is mine ! Heart for heart ! What you have admitted, I too must admit. I owe it to you, Mathilde. Humbly but sincerely I lay my confession at your feet.

[*A silence.*]

MME DE POMMERAYE : Is this possible ?

MARQUIS : I swear it before heaven ! In all our misfortune there is only one happy thought—that the passion we mourn passed from us both at the same moment (*She sobs behind her handkerchief.*) Should that not bring us some small consolation ?

MME DE POMMERAYE (*mourning herself*) : Yes—yes ! For how wretched I should now be if my love had lived on, while yours was dead !

MARQUIS : Oh if by some mischance I had betrayed my own secret before yours was spoken !

MME DE POMMERAYE (*about to sob again*) : Ah ! What we have escaped !

MARQUIS : Yes, Mathilde ! But how well emotion becomes you ! Never have you seemed to me lovelier than at this moment !

MME DE POMMERAYE : Can that be true ?

MARQUIS : Ah, yes ! Had I not learned from experience, I could believe myself more in love with you than ever !

[He seizes her hands and presses kisses on them. She withdraws them and turns away.]

MME DE POMMERAYE : But tell me—what lies before us now ?

MARQUIS : True friendship and deep contentment ! You claim from me a higher regard than ever before—and I trust I deserve some measure in return.

MME DE POMMERAYE : You deserve—ah, you deserve—

MARQUIS : Then let us continue to meet free from the pangs of dying passion ! let us shine afresh and incomparable, an example to the world !

MME DE POMMERAYE : So your fear of being commonplace is ended ?

MARQUIS : This time we shall place ourselves above all imitation. Yes, above it ! Let the rabble talk of their intellectual liberties ; we shall establish a liberty of the heart. We shall laugh at the world's opinion of us, while we confide our conquests to each other.

MME DE POMMERAYE : Conquests ?

MARQUIS : They are inevitable. You will have more of them than I, Mathilde. You deserve more, for yours is the loftier and stronger nature.

MME DE POMMERAYE : Oh, no, no !

MARQUIS : And also your charms have made me hard to please. Yet I shall hope, if not to rival you, at least to follow at a distance. Should either of us doubt the dictates of our heart, the other will lend support and guidance. All my experience will be at your command, and your fastidious taste at mine.

MME DE POMMERAYE : Yes, that should save us many blunders.

MARQUIS : But what if all comparisons with other women should bring me back to you ? What if I should learn once again that Madame de Pommeraye is the only creature to bring me happiness ? Such a return would surely be the pinnacle of human refinement.

MME DE POMMERAYE : Always supposing that I were ready to receive you. For what if so auspicious a moment found me straying elsewhere ?

MARQUIS : Nothing would console me—unless perhaps my own better judgment, pointing out how wrong you were.

MME DE POMMERAYE : You are a true D'Arcy, worthy of the motto of your house.

MARQUIS : Yes, *Sans Pareil*. And secure in the knowledge that you would not have me otherwise.

MME DE POMMERAYE : Still I may have other views of what goes to make distinction.

MARQUIS : Pride first of all, and that you share with me. To-day we have earned the right to be proud.

MME DE POMMERAYE : So far only by words

MARQUIS : Do you doubt our capacity for deeds?

MME DE POMMERAYE . I at any rate shall try my best.

[*The FOOTMAN enters.*

FOOTMAN : The two ladies are downstairs, my lady.

MME DE POMMERAYE : Show them into the other room.

[*FOOTMAN bows and withdraws.*

MARQUIS : Two ladies? But surely you are not receiving strangers?

MME DE POMMERAYE : Two former friends of mine, old neighbours from Brittany. I found them stranded in Paris, quite penniless.

MARQUIS : Are they sisters?

MME DE POMMERAYE : Mother and daughter.

MARQUIS : Should one meet them, do you think?

MME DE POMMERAYE : Hardly.

MARQUIS : Ah—not presentable?

MME DE POMMERAYE : That depends.

MARQUIS . You begin to excite my curiosity

MME DE POMMERAYE : These are two poor creatures in real misfortune, asking only to be let alone.

MARQUIS : But on the contrary, you are showing them a kindness.

MME DE POMMERAYE : The greatest kindness is to protect them from idle acquaintanceships.

MARQUIS : But before relieving misfortune one should know the cause. In charity that is always my principle. No one pities the poor more than I do.

MME DE POMMERAYE : Because you know they can never be rich.

MARQUIS : True, true. poor creatures ! But one must discriminate. I hope these friends of yours are not presuming on your good-nature.

MME DE POMMERAYE : A woman like myself can judge that best.

MARQUIS : As you please.

MME DE POMMERAYE : And now it is time for your usual evening amusements.

MARQUIS : Engagements. Mathilde.

MME DE POMMERAYE : As you please. I send you away with one heartfelt wish may all your newest expectations be fulfilled !

MARQUIS : So to-day's talk has made everything clear between us ?

MME DE POMMERAYE : I wonder if you know how clear ?

MARQUIS : And no primitive passions linger in our hearts ?

MME DE POMMERAYE : None.

MARQUIS : Perhaps the least trace here and there ? (*She smiles at him.*) You must feel it as I do, Mathilde ?

MME DE POMMERAYE : Not in the least.

MARQUIS : Until to-morrow then ?

MME DE POMMERAYE : Until to-morrow—as always.

[*She holds out her hand, which he kisses.*

MARQUIS : Goddess ! Goddess !

[*The MARQUIS goes out.*

MME DE POMMERAYE *makes no sign till the doors have closed behind him ; then a suppressed fury she cries out.*

MME DE POMMERAYE : Oh ! Oh ! *She recovers and compels herself to smother a sigh.* But only wait ! I shall be revenged, if it cost me life itself !

[*She rings and the FOOTMAN appears.*

FOOTMAN . You rang, my lady ?

MME DE POMMERAYE : Has the Marquis gone ?

FOOTMAN . His carriage is just leaving, my lady.

MME DE POMMERAYE : Show them in

[*FOOTMAN bows and withdraws*

A moment later he opens the doors admitting MME DUQUESNOY and her daughter.

MME DUQUESNOY : Marchioness !

MME DE POMMERAYE : So you have come.

MME DUQUESNOY : We obeyed your summons. This is my daughter.

HENRIETTE (*with a deep contempt*) : Marchioness !

[*MME DE POMMERAYE inspects her closely.*

MME DE POMMERAYE : Her name ?

MME DUQUESNOY . Henriette.

MME DE POMMERAYE : Her age ?

MME DUQUESNOY Nineteen

HENRIETTE Not until next month, mamma.

MME DE POMMERAYE Her figure is passable

MME DUQUESNOY I assure you it is perfect, when——

HENRIETTE (*warningly*) Mamma !

MME DE POMMERAYE Tell me how long have you been in Paris ?

MME DUQUESNOY Nearly eight months

MME DE POMMERAYE And were you without resources when you arrived ?

MME DUQUESNOY No, all our savings have been lost in the lawsuit. If your ladyship only knew——

MME DE POMMERAYE (*cutting her short*) Yes, yes, over your late husband's estate. Then how did you manage to live ?

MME DUQUESNOY At first we were helped by relative. They were very kind at first.

MME DE POMMERAYE And then ?

MME DUQUESNOY (*hesitating*) Your ladyship means——

MME DE POMMERAYE What then ? (*She scrutinises them again, this time through a lorgnette*) Your appearance is hardly poverty-stricken.

MME DUQUESNOY You see, a friend of one of our relatives—but I would rather not tell you his name—not that you would know him.

MME DE POMMERAYE I see. You mean that this friend took an interest in Henriette ?

MME DUQUESNOY Yes, quite a special interest (*Hurriedly*) At first he used to call in the evening for a game of cards—quite a gentleman he was—and then one evening—well, one evening——

MME DE POMMERAYE : You may omit the details of that visit.

MME DUQUESNOY (*confusedly*) : But it was after my daughter had been singing—you see, she always used to sing—and to her own accompaniment too——

HENRIETTE (*firmly*) : Mamma !

[MME DE POMMERAYE turns to HENRIETTE.

MME DE POMMERAYE : So singing is one of your accomplishments, mademoiselle ?

HENRIETTE : Yes, your ladyship.

MME DUQUESNOY : I can assure you she has a ravishing voice !

MME DE POMMERAYE (*driby*) : So it would appear from your story.

MME DUQUESNOY : And as we were so much indebted to this friend of ours already—your ladyship will understand——

MME DE POMMERAYE : Pray let us hear the last of this person.

MME DUQUESNOY : Only you must not judge us too harshly—after what we had endured—two ladies of gentle birth here in Paris——

MME DE POMMERAYE : I have no moral prejudices, and your private lives do not concern me. But your gentle birth may be of service to us all.

MME DUQUESNOY : Life is very hard.

[MME DE POMMERAYE inspects HENRIETTE again.

MME DE POMMERAYE : This young lady seems to have borne it well enough. Certainly her looks have not suffered.

MME DUQUESNOY : What I have told you happened many months ago.

MME DE POMMERAYE . The time does not concern me either.

MME DUQUESNOY : And since then you must not imagine that everybody—that is to say, not everybody by any means——

MME DE POMMERAYE . Not am I interested in numbers. Your daughter's past—what there is of it—is sufficiently clear. She has been disposed of once, she may be disposed of again

MME DUQUESNOY . Oh, spare her feelings, your ladyship !

HENRIETTE : How absurd, mamma !

MME DE POMMERAYE . The girl is right. We are not here to give mutual proofs of our respectability. I need you for a special purpose, which you must clearly understand. That is why you have been sent for

MME DUQUESNOY : Oh !

HENRIETTE . But of course, mamma, a lady like the Marchioness could never take an interest in us from charity alone. I know enough gentlemen of rank to be sure of that.

MME DUQUESNOY . I suppose I am an old-fashioned mother

MME DE POMMERAYE : Then let your daughter speak. She seems to understand me.

HENRIETTE : Yes, my lady ; and so does mamma if she would admit it. We were only saying just now on the stairs that you would never do anything without a reason, and we are so short of money we cannot afford to take offence at anything—in spite of gentlemen friends !

MME DUQUESNOY : Henriette ! A daughter of mine——

MME DE POMMERAYE (*silencing her with a gesture*) : She may not express herself with undue

modesty, but the sense is admirably clear. And after all, why should she be modest? To-day we are enlightened enough to discuss such matters frankly.

MME DUQUESNOY : I know my daughter, your ladyship—she wishes to please you by her outspokenness.

MME DE POMMERAYE : And she succeeds.

MME DUQUESNOY : But that gives a false idea of her character. It is true our poverty has obliged her to make sacrifices, but she has acquired no taste for the wicked licence of these times.

MME DE POMMERAYE : So much the better.

MME DUQUESNOY : Yes, indeed ! Whatever depended on it—our future, our lives or even the result of our lawsuit—she could never stoop deliberately to allure a man.

HENRIETTE : And if mamma means to weary your ladyship with a list of my virtues, I can forestall her. She might mention that I was ready to give up several wealthy lovers for a young and pious abbé.

MME DUQUESNOY : Oh ! Oh !

MME DE POMMERAYE : Indeed ?

HENRIETTE : Yes, until I found his piety to be assumed. I can bear everything but hypocrisy, my lady. And you can believe me if I tell you I wish to change my way of life.

MME DE POMMERAYE : Very good. Now we are three women of the world, women who know how to handle men. (*To HENRIETTE*) You may be seated and listen to me.

HENRIETTE (*seating herself*) : Thank you, my lady.

MME DE POMMERAYE : It will suffice if you call me madame. Now how well are you known in Paris ?

MME DUQUESNOY : In a certain neighbourhood—in our own quarter—unfortunately only too well.

HENRIETTE : Our lodging is in the Rue de Lille

MME DUQUESNOY : The better end of the Rue de Lille.

MME DE POMMERAYE : I am not acquainted with the Rue de Lille. But in spite of this—this notoriety—you tell me you are destitute ?

MME DUQUESNOY . The lawyers have had every sou. Oh, the lawyers, madame—

HENRIETTE : Mamma !

MME DE POMMERAYE . Then if I should offer to make both your fortunes, what would you say ?

MME DUQUESNOY . What should we say ? Oh, your ladyship—I mean madame !

HENRIETTE : Wait.

MME DE POMMERAYE . She is right, there are conditions. The first is that you place yourself entirely in my hands. I shall have orders to give. They will be carried out instantly and without question. I shall ask much of you

HENRIETTE : Not more than the gentlemen, I am sure !

MME DUQUESNOY : You can rely on us. Only tell us what our task is to be.

MME DE POMMERAYE : Not a word, not a sign of hesitation ?

MME DUQUESNOY : Never !

MME DE POMMERAYE : Your daughter understands that too ?

HENRIETTE : Yes, madame.

MME DE POMMERAYE : Very good. You had better sell your present furniture—and also your clothes, they are too conspicuous. From this evening onward you are not to be seen in public places. You follow me—no coffee-houses, no visits to the opera or theatres. Also you will receive no visitors in any circumstances.

MME DUQUESNOY : Then how are we to live ?

HENRIETTE : Hush, mamma

MME DE POMMERAYE : I shall myself engage a lodging for you in some respectable suburb—as far as possible from your present quarter. By the time you move there you will be dressed in black—which by the way will suit Henriette perfectly. Your behaviour will be accordingly discreet. You will pass for charitable ladies—possibly rescue workers or the like.

HENRIETTE : Yes, madame. I have had to do with plenty of those.

MME DE POMMERAYE : Your chief occupation will be needlework—to be sold for the poor. You will be seen frequently at church. Make the acquaintance of the clergy in your new parish.

HENRIETTE : And perhaps we can visit the nuns of some convent too ?

MME DE POMMERAYE : Their good report of you will suit my purpose very well.

MME DUQUESNOY : And what is this purpose ?

MME DE POMMERAYE : I think you are not so inquisitive as your mother, Henriette ?

HENRIETTE : No, madame.

MME DE POMMERAYE : Very good. You understand that your interest in this matter is only outward, while mine is deeply personal. Now what is this name under which you have been passing ?

MME DE POMMERAYE : Her views are most sound. Now I shall not pay you any visits, lest you should be compromised and thought worldly. But you will come to see me often enough in private, when we can settle everything as we wish. Meanwhile, I shall defray the expenses of your modest household.

MME DUQUESNOY : And are we to hear not a word of what you want from us ?

MME DE POMMERAYE : All in good time. If you wish to consider the proposal, I will give you until to-morrow morning to talk it over.

HENRIETTE : We have nothing to lose by accepting it now, madame.

MME DUQUESNOY : My daughter goes too far—we have always——

HENRIETTE : I have nothing to lose.

MME DUQUESNOY : Every girl has something, remember that !

MME DE POMMERAYE : Then suppose we say to-morrow ? I reserve the right to withdraw my offer too.

MME DUQUESNOY (*hastily*) : No, no, madame ! I have nothing against the plan.

HENRIETTE : We accept your offer here and now.

MME DE POMMERAYE (*looking from one to the other*) : In blind obedience ?

HENRIETTE : Yes, madame.

MME DE POMMERAYE : Then that is enough for to-day. Give me your hands on it.

[MME DUQUESNOY takes her hand, but HENRIETTE draws back.]

HENRIETTE : Is mine fit for you to take, madame ?

MME DE POMMERAYE • Quite fit for what I shall give you to do

[HENRIETTE takes her hand

Now both of you may go home To-morrow evening at this hour your lodgings will be ready You may call here for the keys (To MME DUQUESNOY) Here is money until then

MME DUQUESNOY glances hastily at the coins, then kisses her hand effusively Ah how shall we thank your ladyship! How shall we prove our gratitude!

MME DE POMMERAYE By trying to unlearn such manners

MME DUQUESNOY And if there should be a man in the case, nobody can play the careful mother better than I. Only you should take care, madame

MME DE POMMERAYE I?

MME DUQUESNOY Yes for if my daughter is to be the bait, who knows which of us the fish will snap up in the end? Ah madame?

MME DE POMMERAYE That is not in the best of taste

HENRIETTE Certainly not, mamma

MME DUQUESNOY Oh very well, I was only warning her ladyship (To MME DE POMMERAYE) My daughter's character is stronger than you would guess. She can play the rival to any woman alive. She looks well enough now, but wait until we show her properly

MME DE POMMERAYE I can see already how attractive she may be

HENRIETTE (taking leave with a deep curtsy)
Thank you, madame

[The Footman enters, announcing •

FOOTMAN The Marquis d'Arcy!

MME DE POMMERAYE (*summoning her wits*)
Leave me. Go past this gentleman without a word, without a sign.

[*The MARQUIS enters.*

MARQUIS : Pardon me, I left a snuff-box here.
But——

[*The two visitors pass him as though ignoring his presence. He betrays his amazement on seeing HENRIETTE, and stares after them.*

MME DE POMMERAYE (*calmly*) . Back again so soon, Marquis ? Ah, to be sure, your snuff-box ! But after our new compact, why not simply say, “ I returned from curiosity to see this pair of women ? ”

MARQUIS : Who was that incredible and radiant creature ?

MME DE POMMERAYE : The mother or daughter ?

MARQUIS : Why were they here ?

MME DE POMMERAYE : I told you of their misfortunes. They came to me for the little comfort I could give ; and now they must return to their poverty and loneliness.

MARQUIS : Are you sure nothing can be done ?

MME DE POMMERAYE : Quite sure.

MARQUIS : But, Mathilde——

MME DE POMMERAYE : In the name of humanity one should leave them to themselves. That is a word to you especially.

MARQUIS (*after a silence*) : Just as you wish.

MME DE POMMERAYE : From now onward you can pay your court to so many women. This one should be respected.

MARQUIS : Quite.

[Enter FOOTMAN and MAIDS. The FOOTMAN wheels in front of them, as a matter of course, a set of ivory chessmen, ready placed on a table. Then he bows and withdraws again.

MME DE POMMLRAYE Our usual game of chess ?

MARQUIS : I shall be charmed. How delightful, my dear Mathilde, that no change in our way of life interferes with our pleasures !

MME DE POMMLRAYE : I shall even keep the key of your mansion—the private door, of course. Unless you would wish me to return it ?

[He is embarrassed but gallant.

MARQUIS : How could you think of such a thing ?

MME DE POMMLRAYE . And now for our little game.

[The MARQUIS takes a red and white pawn in either hand, holds them behind his back and then presents them in his closed hands.

MARQUIS . Your colour, Mathilde ?

[But she shakes her head and smiles at him.

MME DE POMMLRAYE Oh, no, Marquis, you were white yesterday To-day it is my turn

MARQUIS : You remember everything !

MME DE POMMLRAYE It may be well that one of us remembers something.

MARQUIS : Ah—quite.

MME DE POMMLRAYE . And then, you see, white moves first.

[She makes her move and he makes another, she moves again.

MARQUIS (regarding the table, perplexed) : Surely that is a new gambit ?

MME DE POMMLRAYE . Yes, Monsieur Philidor was kind enough to show it me.

MARQUIS : Ah, Philidor !

[He moves.]

MME DE POMMERAYE : Do you know he is also the composer of twenty-seven operas ?

[She moves.]

MARQUIS : A piece of impudence in a chess-player.

[He moves.]

MME DE POMMERAYE : I hear he plays daily with Voltaire.

[She moves.]

MARQUIS : That may account for his assurance.

[He moves.]

MME DE POMMERAYE : May I point out that your queen is in danger ?

[He hastily withdraws his move.]

MARQUIS : Dear me, I was thinking of other things. You are too generous, Mathilde.

MME DE POMMERAYE : As I am always.

[She looks at him calmly.]

MARQUIS : I must collect myself. To-day I find the atmosphere disturbing.

[He makes another move.]

MME DE POMMERAYE : But how pleasant to think that there is one game left to us that depends on skill alone.

[She moves.]

MARQUIS : On the contrary, Mathilde ! Set two equal players at a chess-table, and the stronger character will win ! And what is character but chance ?

[He moves.]

MME DE POMMERAYE : You positively must be right, for this time I *take* your queen.

[She removes his queen

MARQUIS . No, no !

MME DE POMMERAYE Yes, yes ! One warning is enough !

[He makes a despairing gesture

You resign ?

MARQUIS Obviously

MME DE POMMERAYE Then now it is your turn for white

[They change places at the table

C U R T A I N

S C E N E II

A few days later The drawing-room as before

When the curtain rises HENRIETTE, dressed in black, is alone and waiting MME DE POMMERAYE enters.

MME DE POMMERAYE Your mother ?

HENRIETTE She is already in the summer-house, madame, awaiting your signal We understood it would be given at four o'clock

MME DE POMMERAYE I sent for you personally first By the way, your appearance is greatly improved.

HENRIETTE *(with an inclination)* . Thank you, madame

MME DE POMMERAYE Now you should be able to report to me in your mother's place.

HENRIETTE : I think so, madame.

MME DE POMMERAYE When last I heard, you had already had two encounters in some public gardens ?

HENRIETTE : Yes, madame, and both apparently by accident.

MME DE POMMERAYE : The design, on your side, must never appear.

HENRIETTE : That is understood.

MME DE POMMERAYE : And what happened after the second encounter ?

HENRIETTE : Just what your ladyship had foreseen. The Marquis did everything possible to discover where and how we lived.

MME DE POMMERAYE : These gardens lie between the church and your lodging, do they not ?

HENRIETTE : Yes. He seemed to know that was the only direction our walks would take.

MME DE POMMERAYE : Good !

HENRIETTE : Perhaps on that account, he hesitated to come up to us too boldly. But we found him continually crossing our path, though we never raised our eyes to give one sign of recognition. Yesterday, as we left the first Mass, he came to the second ; but this morning he was there at the first celebration.

MME DE POMMERAYE : What, at daybreak ?

HENRIETTE : Yes, madame.

MME DE POMMERAYE : This man must be smitten indeed !

HENRIETTE : So mamma declares too.

MME DE POMMERAYE : And what is your own opinion ?

HENRIETTE (*with downcast eyes*) : Of course it may be so.

MME DE POMMERAYE : You have experience enough to be certain one way or the other.

HENRIETTE : I never troubled to study gentlemen's thoughts, madame. I found it was very seldom worth while. So I cannot say if the Marquis is obeying his own nature, or only following some plan by which he hopes to gain his end more quickly.

MME DE POMMERAYE : At least you can see what end he is hoping for ?

HENRIETTE (*modestly*) : I fear there is no doubt of it.

MME DE POMMERAYE : You must, of course, behave as if you never dreamed of such a possibility. Difficult as that may be for you.

HENRIETTE : It is not easy, madame.

MME DE POMMERAYE : You are once more a young woman of good family, whose thoughts never stray from paths of modesty. Unless you feel that—as I trust you do—you are bound to betray yourself. I am sorry I did not see your meeting with the Marquis, so that I could judge of your behaviour.

HENRIETTE : Your ladyship may be sure it was correct.

MME DE POMMERAYE : That depends on actions, not words. On movements especially. Downcast eyes can be wanton if their owner chooses.

HENRIETTE (*raises her eyes*) : Do you think me capable of that ?

MME DE POMMERAYE : Not here, or at this moment.

HENRIETTE : Or has the Marquis had that impression ? You must have taken pains to discover what he thinks of me.

MME DE POMMERAYE : That is my own affair.

HENRIETTE : And mine is obedience to your orders, madame.

[*A silence.*]

MME DE POMMERAYE : Now you may sit. Tell me, how do you like the Marquis ? I mean, how does he strike you ?

HENRIETTE : Pardon me, madame, but I have not yet been told to interest myself in him personally.

MME DE POMMERAYE : Oh, women never think of him without interest, however slight the acquaintance. You must not hide your feelings merely because you are playing a part. If you should take a liking to him, that might suit our plans very well.

HENRIETTE : If you wish me to regard the Marquis differently, then I must do so, madame.

MME DE POMMERAYE : Do not misunderstand me ; I only wish your attitude to be convincing. Every deception requires a certain sense of truth. What he sees in you, that you must be. I supposed you had learned so much during your career of gallantry.

HENRIETTE : Perhaps it was too short, madame.

MME DE POMMERAYE : The secret is complete outward reserve, but complete inward surrender to the task in hand. I need not press the point. In any case the Marquis is bound to appeal to you.

HENRIETTE : Very well, madame, if those are your orders.

MME DE POMMERAYE : And now continue.

HENRIETTE : To-day my mother learned that he had made some further advances. Believing we were dependent on charity, he had tried through our landlord to convey money to us without wounding our pride.

MME DE POMMERAYE : And what steps did you take in return ?

HENRIETTE I at once wrote this letter, which I have brought for your approval

MME DE POMMERAYL You may read it to me.

HENRIETTE (*reading*)

"SIR,— I am aware that in the times in which we live, men of rank and wealth abuse their power by all too many liberties

"Thus it comes about that a nobleman can wound the sensibility of a young gentleman—and the more deeply since her own misfortunes have been undeserved

"I am aware also that no word of mine can awaken in you any echo of finer feeling or remorse, that indeed you would consider open protest a sign of secret encouragement of your designs

"One course alone is therefore open to me, and that is to address you through our only mutual acquaintance. She will hand you this letter, so that you may be finally convinced of the vanity of your presumptions

"Your advances in any case could do nothing but lower in her own esteem, and in that of the world, the woman who signs herself in true humility,

"HENRIETTE DUQUESNOY "

MME DE POMMERAYL And did you actually compose this letter yourself?

HENRIETTE But why not, madame?

MME DE POMMERAYL Admirable! Every phrase is a credit to your education. From whom did you learn such a style?

HENRIETTE From the abbé I was indiscreet enough to mention to you, madame.

MME DE POMMERAYL I hope you have really done with him, for otherwise I should mistrust his influence.

HENRIETTE : One thing I can say, madame. No man yet has ever truly moved me.

MME DE POMMERAYE : I wonder, are you to be envied or not ? It may help you to play the innocent, but I wish you to be womanly through and through—not the slave of passion but her mistress. For unless you seem to offer everything, what you withhold can be of little account.

HENRIETTE (*hiding her face in her hands*) : Oh !

MME DE POMMERAYE : Enchanting ! Just so ! A hint of coquetry slips through your fingers, then you are grave again. Now at four o'clock you dine with the Marquis and myself. If all goes well I shall leave you together for a few moments. Remember your letter, remember everything I have told you. I trust you to make good use of the time.

HENRIETTE : Very well, madame.

MME DE POMMERAYE : You and your mother will be waiting in the summer-house. I shall give you the signal to join us by opening the window. Study your deportment carefully. You show too much ankle as you are sitting now.

HENRIETTE : It was not on purpose.

MME DE POMMERAYE : Probably not, but such indecencies must be avoided. The Marquis has sharp eyes. In all matters of dress and carriage you will do well to ask my advice, rather than your mother's.

HENRIETTE : I know that, madame.

MME DE POMMERAYE : And how, pray ?

HENRIETTE : Because a more womanly woman than Madame de Pommeraye is not to be found.

MME DE POMMERAYE . What precisely do you mean by that ?

HENRIETTE : Something words cannot precisely express, madame.

MME DE POMMERAYE . You may join your mother.

[HENRIETTE makes her curtsy and goes.

MME DE POMMERAYE rings and her steward appears.

SILWARD . My lady ?

MME DE POMMERAYE : Is everything as I ordered it ?

SILWARD . Dinner at four, my lady. Four places laid. Your ladyship will sit with your back to the window. The Marquis on your right, Mme Duquesnoy on your left. Mademoiselle Duquesnoy in the full light.

MME DE POMMERAYE . Very well. That is all.

SILWARD . Thank you, my lady.

[The SILWARD goes.

MME DE POMMERAYE (*going to the window and looking out*) : " In the full light " Not that she needs it to dazzle men. Heaven gave her enough !

[A FOOTMAN enters announcing.

FOOTMAN . The Marquis d' Arcy !

[The MARQUIS enters, and the FOOTMAN goes.

MARQUIS (*after kissing her hand*) . My dearest friend ! How do you put up with Paris in this intolerable heat ?

MME DE POMMERAYE : I no longer suffer from sleepless nights.

MARQUIS : Hum—no, no.

MME DE POMMERAYE : Or from other indulgences, however respectable. How are yours, by the way ?

MARQUIS : My indulgences ! Only the most foolish trifles that I thought I had done with for ever.

MME DE POMMERAYE : Then do you find yourself beginning again ?

MARQUIS . No, only coming to an end.

MME DE POMMERAYE : How can that be ?

MARQUIS . At last I have found an antidote.

MME DE POMMERAYE . Are you gallant enough to pretend that your grief at losing me obliges you to console yourself ? Even against your will and judgment ?

MARQUIS : No, Mathilde, it is not that.

MME DE POMMERAYE . What then ?

MARQUIS . Since our compact of truthfulness, I have been incapable of lying . Besides, you have known at out it all for weeks .

MME DE POMMERAYE . I have certainly noticed how preoccupied you are. Your life of distinction seems not to be so easy to attain .

MARQUIS . I am further from it than ever.

MME DE POMMERAYE . You, who were resolved to scale the topmost peak ?

MARQUIS : Until my will met a desire more compelling than itself.

MME DE POMMERAYE . Not this young woman's, I trust ?

MARQUIS : My own longing, that she revealed to me !

MME DE POMMERAYE . So our provincial Henriette is the worker of miracles ?

MARQUIS. Mathilde, you are a judge of beauty, only through your own. We are both in ecstasies over works of art—but what are they beside such a prodigy of nature? Is it strange that I should be enraptured by this blend of charm, simplicity and loveliness?

MME DE POMMERAYE. On the contrary, most natural. I wish you joy of your devotion, since it is all you are likely to achieve.

MARQUIS. What is ambition in a man, what is power, what is life itself if not a pledge of worthiness for such a prize? Either I am fitted to win her, or unworthy to crawl upon this earth! Should I fail, then no success has any meaning. Our very friendship, yours and mine, is meaningless.

MME DE POMMERAYE. Did you say *our* friendship?

MARQUIS. Yes, for it is plain you are her superior in a thousand ways—yet you and I continued to find each other. Is that not a ground for hope?

MME DE POMMERAYE. A most unusual ground. But possibly she has other qualities beside beauty.

MARQUIS. If it were so, which I dare not suppose—my longing for her would grow into a frenzy! This amazing stroke of chance, that I should meet her, brings me suddenly to a moment of decisive choice. On the one hand age and annihilation, on the other youth and rebirth! Who can doubt what my resolve must be?

MME DE POMMERAYE. Has this innocent really bewitched you?

MARQUIS. Ah, Mathilde, I see that my words mean nothing to you! But how happy I should

be, if only you too had such a confession to make.

MME DE POMMERAYE : I ?

MARQUIS : Yes, then I should know you understood my passion ! Tell me—is there no young man you find agreeable ?

MME DE POMMERAYE : No one who compares with you.

MARQUIS : Naturally—but still——

MME DE POMMERAYE : In fact I find all men more or less distasteful.

MARQUIS : Can that mean that you still love me, after all ?

MME DE POMMERAYE : Who knows ?

MARQUIS : And that you expect me to return in the end ?

MME DE POMMERAYE : Am I wrong ?

MARQUIS : I see it now. During the time of my freedom you wish your own behaviour to be irreproachable.

MME DE POMMERAYE : Would that not be a generous gesture ?

MARQUIS : Mathilde ! You are capable of every sacrifice.

MME DE POMMERAYE : But if I have no other interest at this moment, I can still feel for you. That was our bargain.

MARQUIS : How wise and understanding you are ! Of course in my own heart I have no doubt of my success. I shall find a way to her.

MME DE POMMERAYE : It is a pity that this time your fortune will not help you.

MARQUIS : I fail to see why not. She has nothing of her own.

MME DE POMMERAYE : Only a considerable pride.

MARQUIS : She will hardly renounce the world altogether. One must accustom her gradually to the thought of wealth and its advantages. Such a beauty as hers requires a proper setting. I cannot possibly think of her as poor—that is an absurdity. The world has no treasures rich enough to be showered upon her.

MME DE POMMERAYE : These two ladies are perfect monuments of piety in our godless city. How can you hope to undermine such characters ?

MARQUIS : You could do much to help me, my dear Mathilde. You have all the means of opening a magical world before their eyes. The way to luxury should be pointed by a woman's hand.

MME DE POMMERAYE : And if my resources should be insufficient, no doubt you will offer to add to them ?

MARQUIS : Naturally. For such a purpose you know everything I have is yours.

MME DE POMMERAYE (*sharply*) : Take care you do not strain our friendship too far ! (*With a gesture*) But let us not speak of my own feelings. What you propose is utterly useless. There was nothing to prevent you from offering money long ago—nothing but the certainty that it would be refused. You never hesitated before in such a case, but this time you feared they might pass beyond your reach for ever. For weeks you have thought of nothing but how to empty your purse for this girl—and what is the result of all your errands and subterfuges ! This letter I have in my hand !

MARQUIS (*astounded*) : A letter to you—from her ?

MME DE POMMERAYE : No, a letter to yourself.

MARQUIS : Is it possible ? Give it me !

MME DE POMMERAYE (*withholding the letter*) : You may find it a painful surprise. It seems you could not have chosen a more fatal course.

MARQUIS : Give it me !

MME DE POMMERAYE : For until now she might have been indifferent, but you have gone out of your way to make her detest you.

MARQUIS : The letter !

MME DE POMMERAYE (*yielding it to him*) : Very well, read it for yourself.

[*The MARQUIS reads.*]

MARQUIS : But—but this is—this——

MME DE POMMERAYE : Hum !

MARQUIS (*reading*) : “ Abuse their power—wound her sensibility—vanity of my presumptions—lower in her own esteem——”

MME DE POMMERAYE : “ And in that of the world.”

MARQUIS : But on the contrary, no one could have been more careful than I.

MME DE POMMERAYE : To conceal your intentions. As if that were the only necessity !

MARQUIS : But you bring me to despair ! What can be done ? Who can prevail on her if not I ? Am I nothing to her ? Tell me, Mathilde !

MME DE POMMERAYE : Girls of her class are neither free of prejudice, like ourselves, nor free of taste, like their inferiors. Between man and woman they can imagine nothing but love pure and simple, such as the poets used to sing in less enlightened days.

MARQUIS : But I swear I *am* in love with her—in my own way !

MME DE POMMERAYE : Then first ask yourself, is it hers ? With these young creatures love is not a parlour game at all. They pay not the least attention to your cultivated needs. They think of inevitable fate, lifelong surrender and so forth. In fact they show the usual conceit and stupidity of their middle-class station, which begins to be seen in politics as well.

MARQUIS : The inevitable fate is mine. Think of the situation into which I am brought !

MME DE POMMERAYE : I find it amazing myself. But what possessed you to wander from your own circle in search of romance ? And now what amends can you make ?

MARQUIS : I can call upon these ladies to-morrow.

MME DE POMMERAYE : By all means. You have only to appear in your satins, complete with carriage, coachman and liveries, to set their street in an uproar and ruin them both for good. For possibly the mother may be thought the object of your pursuit.

MARQUIS : Oh ! Oh ! You wish to provoke me !

MME DE POMMERAYE : I think you are provoking yourself.

MARQUIS : Very good ! I have the means and the will to help them, and no one shall deny me ! Call me mad if you please, but I shall go to them, come what may ! If their door is closed to me, I shall burst it open and answer for nothing ! You shall see !

MME DE POMMERAYE : If any man had wooed me with such passion, could I have withstood him for a day ? Perhaps not.

MARQUIS (*pitiably*) : Henriette ! She must listen to me ! Henriette !

MME DE POMMERAYE : So you are unable to live without this girl ?

MARQUIS : I yearn to possess her, body and soul !

MME DE POMMERAYE : And then you believe your yearnings will be satisfied ?

MARQUIS . Give me that moment !

MME DE POMMERAYE : My dear friend ! You have no one to fear but yourself. Others are doing more for you than you deserve.

MARQUIS : What do you mean ?

[MME DE POMMERAYE opens the door of the room adjoining.]

MME DE POMMERAYE : Look into that room.

MARQUIS : Are we not dining alone ?

MME DE POMMERAYE : Look for yourself.

MARQUIS : Mathilde !

MME DE POMMERAYE : Madame Duquesnoy and her daughter will be with us.

[The MARQUIS throws himself at her feet.]

MARQUIS : My wonderful friend—a thousand thanks !

MME DE POMMERAYE (*forcing herself to smile*) : Now it is time they were here. Leave me to them. You can wait behind the door of that room.

MARQUIS : Divinity !

[He goes into the next room.]

Divinity !

[MME DE POMMERAYE crosses to the window and opens window.]

MME DE POMMERAYE : Monster ! Monster that you are ! How much longer must I endure your torture ? Your own shall last an eternity !

[The MARQUIS shows himself again in the doorway]
MARQUIS I have her letter to hold until we meet!

[She makes a hurried sign to him to keep out of sight Presently MME DUQUESNOY and HENRIETTE enter, and she makes a sign to them in turn that he is within hearing]

MME DE POMMERAYE I am glad you were prevailed upon to return my visit

MME DUQUESNOY We should be thought rude if we had refused, your ladyship, so it was better to accept and be thought unwise

MME DE POMMERAYE But who could possibly object to your visiting my house?

MME DUQUESNOY The friends we depend on for a living. They are afraid we shall be led into extravagance, and we must deny ourselves nearly all pleasures till my daughter's training is finished

MME DE POMMERAYE Ah yes, her voice. And are you satisfied with her progress?

MME DUQUESNOY She sings like an angel, your ladyship. But whatever her success we shall still be poor, for she must only sing at concerts of church music

MME DE POMMERAYE Are you sorry, Henriette, that you must forgo a stage career?

HENRIETTE No, madame, why should I be?

MME DE POMMERAYE Happy innocent! But this evening my oldest friend, the Marquis d'Arcy, is dining here. And I am sure he will be charmed to use his influence with His Eminence the Cardinal

MME DUQUESNOY You are too kind, but we should not wish to push ourselves forward in any way.

HENRIETTE : We have everything in life that we require.

MME DE POMMERAYE : Everything in life that you require ! Few of us are so fortunate. But here is the Marquis.

[He enters and bows to the two ladies.]

Madame and Mademoiselle Duquesnoy. We are told that mademoiselle has a lovely voice.

MARQUIS (*lifts HENRIETTE from curtsey*) : How could it be otherwise ?

MME DE POMMERAYE : She wishes to sing in public, but of course only at concerts of church music.

MARQUIS : The Cardinal. Nothing simpler.

MME DE POMMERAYE : I was just thinking of that.

MARQUIS : I am a passionate lover of music, mademoiselle.

MME DE POMMERAYE : The Marquis often lends his patronage to musical entertainments.

MME DUQUESNOY : But these must be sacred concerts.

MARQUIS : Nothing would delight me more than to serve so good a purpose.

HENRIETTE : I think, mamma, his lordship is only being polite.

MARQUIS : No, no.

MME DE POMMERAYE : This young lady may have good reasons for hesitating to take you at your word.

MARQUIS : Let us hope they will disappear when she knows me better.

MME DE POMMERAYE : Oh, we all know there is a human background to your rank !

MARQUIS : I assure you, ladies, I have only one desire and longing. That is to aim at the highest in every sphere, and make it my own.

MME DUQUESNOY : Well, that is something.

MARQUIS : And as for this young lady's singing, I can declare myself a connoisseur. All I ask is to be enabled to judge.

MME DUQUESNOY : My child, would you be willing to sing for the Marquis ?

HENRIETTE : Not now, mamma. I think it would be too soon.

MARQUIS : But how right she is ! Before she has convinced herself that I admire any composer beside my favourite Rameau !

HENRIETTE : I fear I do not admire him at all.

MARQUIS (*taken aback*) : Indeed ?

HENRIETTE : Rameau flatters everyone into believing he can become a composer in two days.

MARQUIS : Oh ! Oh !

HENRIETTE : Or else a performer—that is why we hear so much inferior playing.

MME DUQUESNOY : If I were you, I should keep such opinions to myself.

HENRIETTE : I hope I am allowed to say what I think.

MARQUIS : But of course ! What you think is enchanting, mademoiselle, enchanting !

MME DE POMMERAYE : Her judgment is certainly unusual.

MARQUIS : And I do not doubt its sincerity.

MME DUQUESNOY : Well, well !

MARQUIS : I grant you, mademoiselle, Rameau finds easy imitators. But we should admit his own talent, which goes far beyond that of Lully for instance.

HENRIETTE : I understood your lordship desired nothing less than the highest.

MME DE POMMERAYE : There she has you, my friend !

MARQUIS : And yet I must stand by my good Rameau.

HENRIETTE : Great art is composed of deep contrasts and lofty harmonies, such as he never knew.

MME DE POMMERAYE : Deep contrasts—lofty harmonies—you hear ? Come, Mme Duquesnoy, let us leave these musical experts to their argument. I will show you a keepsake from our old days in Brittany together.

MME DUQUESNOY : Now to think that a daughter of mine——

[She goes with her hostess into the next room.]

MARQUIS (*with a change of tone*) : Mademoiselle—I——

HENRIETTE (*calmly*) : You were about to say something, Marquis ?

MARQUIS : I was about to say—that harmony is never convincing unless it arises from conflict.

HENRIETTE : But the struggle need not be outwardly manifest.

MARQUIS : Surely a passion that rages within must find outward expression, too ?

HENRIETTE : In life maybe, but in art—— ?

MARQUIS : Everywhere ! Always !

HENRIETTE : Art only records victories.

MARQUIS : But the conflicts must come first !

HENRIETTE : Victories, and peace !

[She seats herself at a harpsichord.]

MARQUIS : Ah ! You will play for me !

HENRIETTE : Do you know the German composer Gluck ? Listen. (*She begins playing softly.*) Only listen. Where is the pride of struggle and self-torture ? Where is anything except the breath of mighty Fate ?

MARQUIS (*bending towards her*) : You must be right, I feel it now.

[*She turns to look at him, then plays again.*]

C U R I A I N

ACT II

SCENE I

*The drawing-room as before, a few weeks later
Afternoon*

*The MARQUIS and MME DE POMMERAYE enter
together from the adjoining room, in animated
conversation*

MME DE POMMERAYE My good Marquis, but
of course I am reproaching you ! What else do
you deserve ?

MARQUIS I am at a loss——

MME DE POMMERAYE Now why do you imagine
I sent for you this afternoon ?

MARQUIS My dearest friend, I know your
interest in this affair of mine——

MME DE POMMERAYE My interest in your
affair ! But I remember, we undertook to have
no secrets in our adventures of the heart

MARQUIS And to give each other help and
encouragement, too

MME DE POMMERAYE Why, next you will tell
me I must throw her into your arms ! Is that
your delightful notion of our friendship ?

MARQUIS You are really perverting every-
thing I say——

MME DE POMMERAYE I— perverting ! You had
better blame your own passion, which seems
to be changing you quite out of knowledge
And not for the better, even in appearance

*[The MARQUIS instinctively seeks a mirror in the
room*

No, not in that glass ! Look into yourself my
friend ! Fortunately I can look behind the mask,
and still see the man you were

MARQUIS : The man I *was* ?

MME DE POMMERAYE . Yes, before you allowed an appetite to degrade you ! (*He makes a movement to protest.*) I said an appetite ! Desire or passion is too good a word . What malice can there be in your own nature, to twist and torture love in such a way ? Other men are exalted by the thought of a woman they adore . You are lowered so far that every thing you do reflects a baseness .

MARQUIS : Mathilde ! These words from you !

MME DE POMMERAYE . If they are bitter, ask yourself how they can be otherwise ! Have these ladies no claim at all to be considered ? Surely they have suffered enough without your trying to shaine them as well !

MARQUIS : I ?

MME DE POMMERAYE . What else are you attempting ! The girl is beautiful, admire her if you will ; but if she wishes to be chaste, why persecute her ? And what have I done to be made your procuress ? I trusted to your honour as a nobleman, and proved it by allowing you to meet her here . But now you abuse every confidence I placed in you .

MARQUIS : I must protest——

MME DE POMMERAYE . Wait . I happen to have read your last and most shameless letter . You sent it secretly to Henriette, with the help of that wretched abbe she formerly knew . It is typical of your methods that you now hire such a person as your go-between . The girl of course did not read the letter herself——

MARQUIS (*pained*) : Ah !

MME DE POMMERAYE —but handed it unopened to her mother, who was justly indignant and felt it her duty to consult me

MARQUIS : That letter makes no secret of my hopes and wishes.

MME DE POMMERAYE : Must I tell you again that it is shameless ? You begin by making her fantastic promises of wealth and luxury, which I grant are well enough concealed by good manners. And next you have the effrontery to propose an elopement. To anyone who knows you both as I do, that seems to prove you have lost your wits altogether.

MARQUIS : For the first time you are right. Yes, Mathilde, I knew it was impossible, but I was mad enough to hope that she would listen ! I felt myself alone and deserted by every helper—even by you—and what could I do ?

MME DE POMMERAYE : If I ceased to help you openly, it was because I knew you were working behind my back. Was that very distinguished ? Is this letter so far removed from the commonplace ? What are you attempting with the girl, if not seduction—the most vulgar of all adventures ?

MARQUIS : Try to understand, Mathilde. It is a long way from the will to the deed.

MME DE POMMERAYE : Fortunately for her !

MARQUIS : And I have troubles of my own—troubles with myself. I have been clumsy—but I have a lifetime of prejudices and worldly wisdom to unlearn. Oh, you may smile, but it is true ! What seems to you a ridiculous infatuation is something new and simple that has come into my life.

MME DE POMMERAYE : Oh ! Oh !

MARQUIS : Yes, every step I take now is taken because it must be—not because fashion or vanity demands it ! Nor even from a craving to be exceptional ! I swear to you again that I care for nothing in this world, if only I can make her mine !

MME DE POMMERAYE : These fine words mean that you would buy her if you could, but you see no chance of it.

MARQUIS : You warned me yourself that my fortune would never help me to her. There again you were right.

MME DE POMMERAYE (*dryly*) : I am glad to hear it.

MARQUIS : I feel, too, that I must try other means. My whole being revolts against offering the temptations of wealth—alluring though they are.

MME DE POMMERAYE : Admirable !

MARQUIS : Think of the coarseness of such a bargain. Even if it succeeded for the moment, nothing could be likelier to ruin our future happiness.

MME DE POMMERAYE (*ironically*) : Am I listening to the Marquis d'Arcy, who holds that everything has a price ?

MARQUIS : I see my world afresh—but in the light of a lifetime's experience.

MME DE POMMERAYE : At least you see the girl is virtuous. And, pray, what are the other means you intend to try ?

MARQUIS : There are a number of possibilities. For instance, she might be influenced by her mother

MME DE POMMERAYE : In the right direction, yes—but in yours ? Surely not, if she is the angelic being you declare.

MARQUIS : Angels may stand above *human* temptation, but yield to spirits of their own kind. Have you never heard of that ?

MME DE POMMERAYE : These must be fruits of your new habit of churchgoing. I warn you I am not so mystical.

MARQUIS : But I am serious, Mathilde ! When I look at this lovely creature, I am continually aware of some destiny that seems to hang over her——

MME DE POMMERAYE : Really !

MARQUIS : —some influence that never betrays itself——

MME DE POMMERAYE : But how absurd !

MARQUIS : —something dark and I could almost say devilish that makes me catch my breath and tremble for her !

MME DE POMMERAYE : Now you are preposterous !

MARQUIS : Yet it is true !

MME DE POMMERAYE (*thoughtful*) : So now you have hopes from the mother's side ?

MARQUIS : She may not be insensible to what I offer.

MME DE POMMERAYE : Shall I tell you something ? Neither mother nor daughter has anything to do with your subtleties. They are simple, pious folk, though I admit the girl has a cultivation that is at times surprising. You have played a double game with them, and you have a bad conscience. If you want to be rid of it, there is one practical step to take.

MARQUIS : What step ?

MME DE POMMERAYE : Be perfectly open and above board. Make no suggestion in letters that you are not ready to confirm by word of mouth. Face them personally, and give your sincerity full play.

MARQUIS : You may be right once more.

MME DE POMMERAYE : By all means approach the mother if you wish. I do not say she is incorruptible.

MARQUIS Ah !

MME DE POMMERAYE Your offer should be generous, but so positive and downright that she can see nothing more is to be looked for

MARQUIS I had the very same idea myself, but you put it more clearly

MME DE POMMERAYE Now we are being sensible.

MARQUIS Then I must find some reason for asking Madame Duquesnoy to come and meet me here

MME DE POMMERAYE I was sure that step would be necessary and so I took it myself

MARQUIS Do you mean that—— ?

MME DE POMMERAYE The ladies are now on their way

MARQUIS How can I tell you of my gratitude ?

MME DE POMMERAYE You might perhaps return my confidence with it

MARQUIS But how—— ?

MME DE POMMERAYE For instance, by naming the figure you have in mind

MARQUIS The figure ?

MME DE POMMERAYE Let us refrain from calling it the price I am sure you have thought of a sum

MARQUIS Well, possibly Would you care to success it ?

MME DE POMMERAYE A million livres ?

MARQUIS More

MME DE POMMERAYE Two million ?

MARQUIS (*smiling*) More

MME DE POMMERAYE My good man !

MARQUIS Considerably more !

MME DE POMMERAYE . Princely !

MARQUIS Well——

MME DE POMMERAYE No, keep your secret, or I may swoon

MARQUIS No woman could doubt my sincerity after that

MME DE POMMERAYE Indeed not ! Why, you could succeed with a duchess on such terms !

MARQUIS But shall I succeed with Henriette !

MME DE POMMERAYE I risk no more prophecies But now I advise you not to try the mother alone Henriette would think it a bribe Be frank with her

MARQUIS (*with conviction*) To-day you are right about everything I shall be frank, and speak to them together

MME DE POMMERAYE That may be the best way of parting with your millions

[*Her tone is slightly changed*]

MARQUIS Now I believe you are vexed with me, Mathilde

MME DE POMMERAYE Vexed ! Vexed ! Why, you are superb—and I thought I knew something about men ! You are prodigious ! Astounding !

MARQUIS It was you who brought me to her Everything is your doing

MME DE POMMERAYE (*under her breath*) May I be justified by my works !

MARQUIS And you will help me still ! Only leave me alone with them first—it is the one favour I ask !

MME DE POMMERAYE So my presence makes you ill at ease ?

MARQUIS Just a few moments, Mathilde !

MME DE POMMERAYE : Just a few moments, then.
I shall take care to time you.

[A bell is heard.]

MARQUIS : So that you may come to my aid
when I need it most.

MME DE POMMERAYE : To your rescue, perhaps.

MARQUIS : You have filled me with confidence.

MME DE POMMERAYE : Then I shall leave you.
That was their ring. I am close by.

[She goes out.]

The FOOTMAN enters, announcing :

FOOTMAN : Madame and Mademoiselle Duques-
noy !

*[The FOOTMAN goes. The two ladies look about
them for their hostess as they enter.]*

MME DUQUESNOY : The Marchioness ?

MARQUIS : Pray be seated, ladies. Our hostess
will join us almost immediately.

[The ladies look at one another.]

MME DUQUESNOY : Oh ! But, Henriette—— ?

HENRIETTE (*calmly*) : Yes, mamma ?

MME DUQUESNOY : Perhaps you should—— ?

HENRIETTE (*as before*) : No, mamma !

MARQUIS : It is the wish of the Marchioness that
I should entertain you in her absence. (*Takes
HENRIETTE'S hand*)

*[He places chairs for them, but they decline and
retire to a couch.]*

MME DUQUESNOY : This will do, Henriette.

HENRIETTE (*joining her*) : Certainly, mamma.

[They look at each other again]

MARQUIS : I am told your visit to-day is chiefly on my account.

[HENRIETTE is about to speak but a gesture from her mother checks her.

MME DUQUESNOY : Not yet, my child.

HENRIETTE : Very well, mamma.

MARQUIS : It is true, madame, that I had the boldness to address proposals to your daughter—and proposals which in your eyes must appear contemptible. But my letter has achieved one purpose, if it has aroused in its readers an emotion one hundredth part as deep as that which compelled it to be written.

MME DUQUESNOY (*after a glance from HENRIETTE*): My daughter, sir, is unaware of its contents.

MARQUIS : So I believe ; and I understand your concern for her fate. It was well that what I wrote should fall into your hands. I could wish no better reader, for those who have a common object of affection must be united by a special tie.

[HENRIETTE and her mother exchange glances again.

HENRIETTE : Perhaps I should read the letter, mamma ?

MME DUQUESNOY : No, my child !

MARQUIS : If you think my offer frivolous, I beg you only to consider by whom it is made. My friendship with our hostess should be enough to commend me. I say nothing of the rank of Marquis of Arcy and Marigny, peer of France, gentleman of the bedchamber to His Majesty ; or my position as owner of large estates in several provinces. I admit that until recently my way of life was lamentably different from your own. I accepted the path that destiny had

marked out for me, and all my desires were limited to the horizon of an exalted but selfish circle. I make this confession not as a callow youth, but as a man of the world rich in experience. You, madame, will understand me.

MME DUQUESNOY : Henriette, possibly you should leave us now.

HENRIETTE : Not yet, mamma

MARQUIS : At this crisis in my life—for so it has proved—I encounter the young girl who is your daughter, madame. Suddenly, at one stroke, all is changed for me. My confidence is lost, my security undermined, my complacency almost destroyed. It is true that even before I met her, a certain restlessness had made itself felt in my mind. Her radiance may have cast a shadow before it. But these forebodings were trifling compared with the shock that actually overwhelmed me. So let me speak the language of humanity, and tell you that I love your daughter passionately and immeasurably. I place my fate without reserve in your admirable hands.

MME DUQUESNOY : Sir— I

MARQUIS : Pray allow me to conclude. Now that I have confessed so much, let me keep nothing from you. One thought, I am bound to say, is abhorrent to me. It is that of submitting myself, and the illustrious name I bear, to any outward authority. I have accepted few conventions in my life, and none that were not cut to my own pattern. I am unable to surrender principles even for the sake of my heart. No question of rank is involved, I have no other ties, I am not even married to a duchess—but I think you understand me?

MME DUQUESNOY : Sir—we —

MARQUIS : And one word more, warmer though perhaps bolder. Clearly the value of your

daughter's happiness—let us not speak in the common way of her favours—cannot be estimated. Yet the assurance of protection from the vulgar world, possibly, may have a certain worth. I trust you agree with me?

MME DUQUESNOY : Sir—both of us——

HENRIETTE : The Marquis is still concluding, mamma.

MARQUIS : Fortunately such an assurance is within my means. I am willing to place half my fortune as a barrier between your daughter and the herd.

MME DUQUESNOY (*involuntarily*) : Oh !

MARQUIS : Also, both in Paris and the country, I have mansions where you may reside beyond the reach of any petty slander.

MME DUQUESNOY : But, my lord——

HENRIETTE : More is to come, mamma.

MARQUIS : I stake my body and soul upon this promise. And should that seem an insufficient pledge for your daughter's future, I add five million livres as final proof of my sincerity. (*He pauses an instant*) Further, I add Miromesnil in the Auvergne, a château with two thousand acres. (*He pauses again.*) I think no mother in the world has the right to reject such an offer out of hand.

MME DUQUESNOY : Sir—my daughter——

MARQUIS : I have addressed myself to you, but I know that she too will understand my perfect frankness. (*He bows to HENRIETTE.*) For so much beauty and virtue can seldom be united to so quick an apprehension.

[MME DUQUESNOY *prepares to reply.*

MME DUQUESNOY : Ahem—my lord——

HENRIETTE : Wait, mamma. What can you have to say so hastily ? And what answer can possibly match such an offer ? If it should be a hurried yes then his lordship will feel he went too high—we could surely have been bought more cheaply. That must be a mortifying thought. An unconsidered no, and it is plain that millions are beyond our foolish imagination. Why then should they be squandered on us ? We must ask for time before making our decision.

MARQUIS : But I beg you earnestly——

HENRIETTE . Your lordship meant to astonish us, and it would be idle to pretend that you have failed. We are amazed, we are thunder-struck ! We should have known you by this time, Marquis. Now our few illusions have vanished, and a man stands revealed.

MARQUIS . A man who loves you, mademoiselle !

HENRIETTE . You addressed my mother. We are both grateful for your frankness. Let us try to repay it as it deserves. A brutal power has been given you by your fortune and the times in which we live. And you employ it brutally to turn a drawing-room into a bedchamber, where *words* are vain and *deeds* are the only expression.

MARQUIS : But I protest——

HENRIETTE : Leave us ! Wait elsewhere until we have recovered ! You hear me—leave us !

[*The MARQUIS hesitates an instant, then bows abruptly and goes out.*]

MME DUQUESNOY . Henriette ! A château—and millions ! Half a fortune ! Never tell me you mean to refuse.

HENRIETTE . I am the article of commerce. You are the one to approve the price.

MME DUQUESNOY : Whatever you say, I could see the Marquis pleased you !

HENRIETTE : Oh, no doubt he is a man ! So much the better !

MME DUQUESNOY : Then you—you want me to agree ?

HENRIETTE : What else should women do—women who are as false as ourselves ?

MME DUQUESNOY (*embracing HENRIETTE*) : My child—my own ! The château—the millions—I knew it !

[MME DE POMMERAYE *enters*.

MME DE POMMERAYE : The Marquis ? How do you stand ?

MME DUQUESNOY : Ahem—nothing could be better. His lordship admitted a burning passion but deep respect.

MME DE POMMERAYE : How deep ?

MME DUQUESNOY : He offers half his fortune.

MME DE POMMERAYE (*staggered*) : What !

MME DUQUESNOY : And Château Miromesnil into the bargain.

MME DE POMMERAYE : Miromesnil ? Are you mad ?

MME DUQUESNOY : How shall we ever thank your ladyship ?

MME DE POMMERAYE : But surely you did not consent ?

MME DUQUESNOY : Not yet, madame.

MME DE POMMERAYE : Not yet ?

MME DUQUESNOY : Oh, no, madame. We asked for time to make our decision.

MME DE POMMERAYE (*raging*) : Indeed ! And what entitles you to make decisions at all ? How dare you forget our understanding for one moment ? You were to give me blind obedience, absolute surrender.

MME DUQUESNOY : But we could never have foreseen such a generous proposal——

MME DE POMMERAYE : Generous ! Ha !

HENRIETTE (*to her mother*) : Madame is right, mamma. She forbade all gifts, however large.

MME DE POMMERAYE : Yes, I foresaw it well enough ! And I hold you to your word !

MME DUQUESNOY : Oh, madame, you could never wish——

MME DE POMMERAYE : I am the one to judge of wishes !

MME DUQUESNOY (*confused*) : But—but are we to lose—— ?

HENRIETTE (*calmly*) : Leave this to me, mamma.

MME DE POMMERAYE : Yes, *you* will see reason ! If the Marquis knew with whom he was dealing, would he have made such an offer for a moment ? Now do you wish me to tell him to make enquiries in a certain house—regarding women who left it some months ago ? 14 Rue de Lille, was it not ? The better end of the Rue de Lille !

MME DUQUESNOY : Oh ! Oh ! You are robbing us of a fortune !

MME DE POMMERAYE : I never meant to put it into *your* hands !

MME DUQUESNOY (*with cunning*) : But if we were willing to share it with you—— ?

HENRIETTE (*laughing*) : My poor mamma !

MME DE POMMERAYE : Even your daughter laughs !

MME DUQUESNOY : But millions—only listen, your ladyship ! We are poor !

MME DE POMMERAYE : And you had better remain so. Bring your mother to her senses, Henriette !

HENRIETTE (*turning to her mother*) : Everything you say is useless, mamma. Mme de Pommeraye has us in her hands, and she knows her own mind best.

MME DE POMMERAYE : Which does not mean that I must always refuse you your fortune. I might also agree, upon conditions.

MME DUQUESNOY (*reviving*) : Oh, madame ! Then do not ask us to be too hard !

MME DE POMMERAYE : For the present you must be hard as flint. What is this wretched proposal of his ?

MME DUQUESNOY : Millions—wretched ?

MME DE POMMERAYE : Are they a price for your daughter ? Have you no greater ambitions, both of you ?

HENRIETTE : Yes, madame. I have them !

MME DE POMMERAYE : Then make him see that he is further than ever from his goal !

MME DUQUESNOY : But what is yours, madame ?

MME DE POMMERAYE : Trust me and be patient. I only tell you my plan goes well.

MME DUQUESNOY : I was thinking of Henriette's good name——

MME DE POMMERAYE : Her name is in no danger.

MME DUQUESNOY : But what will be the end of it all ?

MME DE POMMERAYE : You will see in good time. Meanwhile leave him to me. Go home immediately. Take what you need for a journey, and quit Paris within the hour.

MME DUQUESNOY : Quit Paris ? But where are we to go ?

MME DE POMMERAYE : Anywhere—no matter ! You will send me your address, and return only when I give the signal.

HENRIETTE : And afterwards, madame ?

MME DE POMMERAYE : Afterwards ?

HENRIETTE : What is to happen ?

MME DE POMMERAYE : Then you shall work out your destinies as you choose.

HENRIETTE : Remember that promise, madame.

MME DE POMMERAYE : What do you mean ?

HENRIETTE : Come, mamma. Let us do what her ladyship wishes.

MME DUQUESNOY : Half a fortune—two thousand acres—

MME DE POMMERAYE : You shall be repaid.

MME DUQUESNOY : Yes—but how much ?

HENRIETTE : Mamma !

MME DE POMMERAYE (*showing them the door*) . That way !

MME DUQUESNOY (*lingering*) . What if everything should fail ?

MME DE POMMERAYE : Nothing will fail.

MME DUQUESNOY : You mean—that if we run he will follow all the faster ? I think only of my daughter. My poor daughter.

[MME DUQUESNOY and HENRIETTE go out]

MME DE POMMERAYE : And now for this man !

[She rings, and the FOOTMAN appears.]

Tell the Marquis we are ready for him.

[The FOOTMAN bows and goes out.]

Presently the MARQUIS appears.

MARQUIS : I was waiting. But where are they ?

MME DE POMMERAYE : You see for yourself.

MARQUIS : Gone !

MME DE POMMERAYE : Far from Paris. Over hill and dale !

MARQUIS : Impossible !

MME DE POMMERAYE : Enquire at their lodging, where they never even stopped to call.

MARQUIS : But why—— ?

MME DE POMMERAYE : Ask yourself that ! You were the one to make this infamous offer !

MARQUIS : Ah, what a tragedy !

MME DE POMMERAYE : Yes, your affair ended none too well. They even blamed me, innocent as I am.

MARQUIS : You ?

MME DE POMMERAYE : You should have heard the contempt this virtuous mother poured upon me !

MARQUIS : And all through my fault !

MME DE POMMERAYE : All through your fault !

[He sinks into a chair.]

Now it is all over, will you listen to your best friend once more ?

MARQUIS (*brokenly*) : Yes, Mathilde !

MME DE POMMERAYE : Then thank your stars for your escape, if you have no one else to thank ! You were nearly lost for ever !

MARQUIS : What am I to do ?

MME DE POMMERAYE : Put mountains, rivers, seas between yourself and France ! Away with you—to Italy, to Greece, to Egypt ! Anywhere ! Forget everything, try only to be yourself again !

MARQUIS : Yes—yes ! Myself !

MME DE POMMERAYE : In some far distant place, become again the shadow of the great Marquis d'Arcy ! Not the victim and perhaps the husband of some little Duquesnoy !

MARQUIS (*staring at her*) Husband ?

MME DE POMMERAYE : Away with you !

CURTAIN

Interval of three minutes for change of scene.

SCENE II

A few weeks later, in the country lodging of the DUQUESNOYS. Early evening. A small and modest room with a door in the background, left, opening into HENRIETTE'S bedchamber. The main entrance is in the middle, from the hall.

MME DUQUESNOY is seated, sewing, and looking up from time to time. Unseen by her, MME DE POMMERAYE enters, shutting the door of the hall behind her. She watches for a moment.

MME DE POMMERAYE : Well, Clementine ?

MME DUQUESNOY (*rising with a start*) : Oh, madame ! Thank heaven you have come ! I was on the point of writing a third time, post-haste to Paris !

MME DE POMMERAYE : What you wrote me was quite enough. You could be sure I would come myself, as quickly as a coach could carry me. (*She accepts a chair placed for her.*) Where is Henriette ?

MME DUQUESNOY (*pointing to the inner door*) . In her bedroom there. I sent the poor child to rest.

MME DE POMMERAYE : Your first letter alarmed me.

MME DUQUESNOY : But you had the second message——

MME DE POMMERAYE : Yes, it came before I set out. So now all is finally settled ?

MME DUQUESNOY : At last she seems calm and decided.

MME DE POMMERAYE : Good !

MME DUQUESNOY : But from hour to hour one never knows what will happen. Only this morning she came pale as a ghost to my bedside and looked at me. " It is impossible ! Never will I marry the Marquis ! "

MME DE POMMERAYE : What, she refused again ?

MME DUQUESNOY : I swear to you, madame, she stood as if turned to stone—and not another word could I get from her for hours.

MME DE POMMERAYE : These excitements may have been too much for her nerves. Most of us would have been the same in her position.

MME DUQUESNOY : Nobody ever offered me one château, let alone three !

MME DE POMMERAYE . There, my good creature, think no more of it.

MME DUQUESNOY . But I was all dumfounded, when I heard the news of his return !

MME DE POMMERAYE . I was even amused myself, though his letters had given a hint of it

MME DUQUESNOY : Amused !

MME DE POMMERAYE . If the man is resolved to marry in spite of himself, why should any of us prevent him ?

MME DUQUESNOY . Why, indeed, madame ?

MME DE POMMERAYE . Two nights ago, I was on the point of dropping off to sleep, when there came such a shouting, barking and lantern-waving that I thought at least there must be a fire or a murder in the house.

MME DUQUESNOY . Terrible !

MME DE POMMERAYE . No sooner had my maid rushed in to wake me, than the Marquis himself appeared, adding to the tumult by shouts of his own.

MME DUQUESNOY . What ! In your bedchamber ?

MME DE POMMERAYE . Without the slightest regard for propriety—though, of course, the apartment was not unknown to him.

MME DUQUESNOY : No, madame

MME DE POMMERAYE . He threw himself at my feet in a burst of sobbing.

MME DUQUESNOY . Sobbing !

MME DE POMMERAYE . After a few threats of suicide and other trifles, it appeared that nothing less than marriage would gratify his passions or his vanity—I was not able to discover which.

MME DUQUESNOY (*impressed*) : Dear, dear !

MME DE POMMERAYE : Only think of my situation ! There the man stood, or rather knelt and crawled, imploring me to aid and abet his folly. The certainty had forced itself into his very bones that he must marry Henriette !

MME DUQUESNOY (*servently*) : Thank heaven for that !

MME DE POMMERAYE : As for the girl's consent, or yours, apparently he never thought of it. I had to settle everything myself. His own plan, I may tell you, would have been a secret wedding that same night, with your little abbé at the altar.

MME DUQUESNOY : The idea !

MME DE POMMERAYE : Now he even does not wish to see her, until she comes to-night as a bride. And yet not an hour has passed without his calling at my house to ask what is happening, like a child on the eve of a birthday.

MME DUQUESNOY : I can tell you, madame, we have been overrun too ! Nothing but his messengers, his porters, his footmen and coachmen and couriers, these twenty-four hours past ! Everything the shops of Paris can offer is ours—dresses, silks, and satins and jewels ! I wonder at such fire in a man of his age.

MME DE POMMERAYE (*bitterly*) : Not to speak of his experience !

MME DUQUESNOY : Yes, I should have thought he had had enough of women !

MME DE POMMERAYE : Let us not be personal, if you please.

MME DUQUESNOY : Oh, I beg your ladyship's pardon ! I forgot—

MME DE POMMERAYE (*with distaste*) That will do—Clementine !

MME DUQUESNOY But in spite of all, I can hardly believe this is the night of her wedding, and from this house ! Oh, madame, what will become of us ?

MME DE POMMERAYE You are well enough provided for—even if they part after a while

MME DUQUESNOY But one thought makes my head turn round That the Marquis may find out the truth after his marriage !

MME DE POMMERAYE That would be his misfortune, not ours

MME DUQUESNOY But what would he do ?

MME DE POMMERAYE It would be no better if he learned it to-day Only the worse for you !

MME DUQUESNOY There you are right—a thousand times the wiser !

MME DE POMMERAYE Have no fear, in a few hours Henriette will be a marchioness Here we are gossiping and neglecting our young bride. How far have her preparations gone ?

MME DUQUESNOY You shall see for yourself

[*She opens the door of HENRIETTE'S room.*]

MME DE POMMERAYE Good !

MME DUQUESNOY Still not ready, child ? You know we must start presently

MME DE POMMERAYE I brought my coach for you There is no time to lose

MME DUQUESNOY What have you been doing all this while ?

[HENRIETTE *appears on the threshold of her room.*]

HENRIETTE Only thinking, mamma

MME DUQUESNOY : Thinking ! That's no occupation for a bride. Your dress—your dress.

[*She goes out.*]

MME DE POMMERAYE : We shall make you beautiful—so all is well.

HENRIETTE : No, madame, all is not well !

MME DE POMMERAYE (*lightly*) : Does the bride wish to change her mind again ?

HENRIETTE (*facing her*) . The man who offers me his hand is a stranger to me. I have spoken to him no more than three times in my life. A stranger whose path I crossed at your desire and bidding

MME DE POMMERAYE : It was quite needless for you to know him any better.

HENRIETTE : Even when he offered marriage ?

MME DE POMMERAYE : Yes, even then.

HENRIETTE : Only listen. When first we met I was nothing but the chance object of his desire.

MME DE POMMERAYE : That was what I made you and wished you to be !

HENRIETTE : True, madame. But now, from the gifts he sends me and the letters he writes, I know his attachment must be deeper. I feel a man's heart is asking mine for an answer—and one that I must not, dare not, give !

MME DE POMMERAYE : He is your bridegroom, that is enough.

HENRIETTE : And so I try to think of him, madame. I tell myself that I matter to him even less than he matters to me. For I know it is not my own troth I am plighting. I have no duties of my own—and even no rights.

MME DE POMMERAYE : You express yourself perfectly. Pay no heed to his rather exaggerated generosity—and equally exaggerated compliments.

HENRIETTE (*quietly*) : They are more than that, madame.

MME DE POMMERAYE : His breeding is perfect, but his style sometimes florid. He would never be ungracious enough to omit the usual shower of flatteries addressed to a bride on her wedding day. But by all means think them sincere if they amuse you.

HENRIETTE : All day I have been trying to take them lightly, but now it is beyond my power. In spite of reason, I find everything about him so human and unconstrained. (*Motionless*) I see that he can be vain and foolish too. But what he is doing now seems so important to himself that it makes me afraid.

MME DE POMMERAYE (*trying to dismiss the subject*) : Charming ! And now for our last touches to your wedding dress. Clementine !

HENRIETTE : You must listen to me, madame—

MME DE POMMERAYE : My child, I have a long experience of this man, who as you say is a stranger to you. I can assure you that you are only one more woman in his life, and one of very many.

[MME DUQUESNOY enters.]

MME DUQUESNOY : Then why does he court her like a young man deep in love ? Tell me that, madame !

MME DE POMMERAYE : The Marquis has his own sense of proportion. Henriette is young, and he wishes to appear no older. Now, Clementine.

HENRIETTE : Mother ! How can I make her understand !

MME DUQUESNOY : There, there ! (*To MME DE POMMERAYE*) Now can you see what I am fearing, madame !

MME DE POMMERAYE : Come, who has the right to judge ? You and the girl, who have met him twice or three times in your lives—or I who know every turn of his character ?

MME DUQUESNOY : And of his heart, madame ?

MME DE POMMERAYE : That too ! If the man were so deluded as you imagine, do you think I would trouble my head about him any more ? No, you and he should go your own way, and I would go mine. Is this marriage not enough for you ? What could you hope to gain by an infatuation as well ?

MME DUQUESNOY : Nothing, madame.

MME DE POMMERAYE (*curtly*) : Then why waste time in talking of it ?

MME DUQUESNOY : Only because my daughter is afraid !

MME DE POMMERAYE : Absurd ! Afraid of what ? His revenge ? He is much too vain to let his folly be known. Nothing would come of it but a comfortable separation.

HENRIETTE : I am not afraid of anything he will do.

MME DE POMMERAYE : Of what, then ?

HENRIETTE : Of myself, madame !

MME DE POMMERAYE (*with a laugh*) : Next you will talk of your conscience !

HENRIETTE : Myself !

MME DE POMMERAYE : Fantastic !

HENRIETTE ' And I swear to you—I must not—
I cannot— any longer —

[*She totters back into MME DUQUESNOY's arms.*

MME DUQUESNOY (*catching her*) Henriette !

MME DE POMMERAYE Clearly these affections
are catching ! Because the Marquis lies about
his heart, the girl must lie too !

HENRIETTE (*freeing herself from her mother's arms*)
I am not lying ! All I want is not to marry him !

MME DE POMMERAYE So then we have it You
are not afraid of your conscience or yourself,
but afraid for him ! Afraid of his own disgrace !
Answer me— am I right ?

HENRIETTE (*with an effort*) Yes, madame !

MME DE POMMERAYE And that means that you
— you—love him ?

HENRIETTE (*not without triumph*) Yes madame !
(*Breaking down again*) Ah !

[*Her mother comes to her*

MME DUQUESNOY My child !

MME DE POMMERAYE A pretty picture—only
let me laugh ! Now you would rather give your
life than the thing you have the power to give !
Now I could plead for him on my knees and you
would never yield him ! Now I could betray
you to him and tear you from him with these
hands—and you would rush to him again !
That is what it means to love ! Deny it if you
will !

[*HENRIETTE is silent.*

Shall I tell you why you find no words ? Because
we three women know each other ! because you
were never so much in my power as at this
moment—never so fiercely driven to obey my
will ! Your fears are my best weapon ! Your love

is what I need to lash you forward ! Why should I have troubled to buy you as my instrument ? Nature herself puts you in my hands ! She has made me stronger than you !

MME DUQUESNOY (*still holding HENRIETTE*) : There she is right, child—you are no match for her !

MME DE POMMERAYE : No. For she is slave and I am mistress !

HENRIETTE : Then I am—I am lost !

MME DE POMMERAYE (*with a change of tone*) : Nonsense, girl—no more than any other woman. This is the night of your wedding.

HENRIETTE : The night—of my wedding.

MME DE POMMERAYE (*to MME DUQUESNOY*) : Come now, on with her dress. Bring it here, Clementine. I shall see to it myself. Stand up, my child—you were too sparing with the powder. (*Powders her.*) That's better. Now, Clementine.

MME DUQUESNOY : Here, madame.

MME DE POMMERAYE : Give me the dress—there—now. (*She busies herself with the dress.*) Why be afraid of the deed you are committing ? Poor little provincials that you are. Turn round, my child.

[HENRIETTE *steps into dress.*

Three things to remember. You have your passion, your mother her cupidity, your bridegroom his desire. These hooks are a shade too far apart. Each of you can have your will—that should be a happy thought. And if I have mine, why should you grudge it me ? And a curl behind the ear. There, much better. (*She stands back to look at HENRIETTE.*) I am the one who

gives you what you crave. The ribbons are just right ; you have taste of your own. Now all you need is a little brightness of expression. As if you understood the truth—that there is not one cloud on your horizon. No, not one. Come, now, it is high time. My coach ! My servants ! The bridegroom waits, glamorous as in a Persian fable. The priest will be ready in an hour.

[The STEWARD enters throwing open the doors in the background. In the hall are seen MAIDS and FOOTMEN.]

Bend your head to me, child, for you are lovely ! Here is my kiss for your brow, and with it the coronet of a marchioness ! Come !

[All three move toward the open doorway.]

CURTAIN

Interval

ACT III

Early morning of the next day, before dawn.

The scene is the hall of the MARQUIS D'ARCY's mansion in Paris. In the background, glass doors opening on to a terrace. In the angle to the right of them, a winding staircase, of which only the lower steps are visible. Under the staircase a door leading to the servants' quarters. A second doorway to the right leads into MME DUQUESNOY's room. Here and there are suits of armour, standards, and family portraits.

The scene is empty at the rise of the curtain. Then MME DUQUESNOY, in her night attire, opens her door, peeps out, comes into the hall and goes toward the stairs.

MME DUQUESNOY : The house is draughty, too. Who came knocking at my door ? It might be anyone ! I know someone was there ! What if it was a stranger ! Ah—my child ! Henriette !

[HENRIETTE *appears on the stairs.*

Did you come knocking ?

HENRIETTE : Several times—but you were fast asleep.

MME DUQUESNOY : What did you want with me ?

HENRIETTE : I was restless.

MME DUQUESNOY : What of that ? Back to your husband ! If he should guess—

HENRIETTE : He is asleep and guesses nothing.

MME DUQUESNOY : And every time he drops off, are you to go wandering like a ghost through his house ?

HENRIETTE : My house. Yours and mine.

MME DUQUESNOY : His, too Think of others beside yourself !

HENRIETTE : I did everything that was asked of me. I thought of others and myself I resisted and yielded I endured the night and feared the morning. My head is high, my heart sinks ever lower.

MME DUQUESNOY : Crazy talk ! Dangerous, too ! Leave thoughts alone and trust your body ! Never ask if you are good or bad !—your looks are good and they will serve. Else you make yourself his enemy.

HENRIETTE : I was that last night when I stood beside him at the altar.

MME DUQUESNOY (*panic-stricken, looking about her*) : Hush !

HENRIETTE And now I am his, which I am not fit to be !

MME DUQUESNOY . What are you saying ?

HENRIETTE : The truth.

MME DUQUESNOY You must have lost your senses

HENRIETTE : No, I have only found myself ! *Myself*—and through this marriage you forced upon me, all of you for your own reasons ! Now it is my turn ! Now comes my destiny—to be the woman *he* desires, the woman *he* imagines ! But first he must learn to know me—both of us must flee from lies !

MME DUQUESNOY : Only be patient—then one day you can understand each other

HENRIETTE : I want more than understanding. I ask a miracle—I cry for it here and now ! Both of us are changed already ; now we must see each other as we are ! We can cast darkness

over men—but radiance too, when we truly belong to them !

MME DUQUESNOY : Back to him ! Run, before he wakens ! Hold him fast and make him *yours*. Never think of what might have been ! Hold him fast !

HENRIETTE : I think of what *must* be ! I must redeem myself—now, while he still guesses nothing !

MME DUQUESNOY : Hold him fast, I say ! What does he ask of you ? Two arms, a body and a smile !

HENRIETTE : No, he asks more, and I must give it him !

MME DUQUESNOY : Back ! You are his wife, you have time for everything !

HENRIETTE : The time is now ! I cannot wrong him again !

MME DUQUESNOY : Enough of that ! I know who wished for the marriage ! Not only Madame de Pommeraye and I—but you as well ! To be his mistress was not good enough—you wanted more ! Now you can go through with it !

HENRIETTE : Until we are found out and ruined utterly ?

MME DUQUESNOY : What ?

HENRIETTE : Can you hear the trumpets sounding for her triumph ?

MME DUQUESNOY : You are raving !

HENRIETTE : I hear them—and I am the one to drag you away ! Now, before dawn ! The first step is to leave his house—freely, of our own will !

MME DUQUESNOY : Leave his house !

HENRIETTE : Come away ! We shall find some place in which to hide ourselves !

MME DUQUESNOY : Henriette !

HENRIETTE : Now we have served her purpose by this marriage. Even you can see that. And what comes afterwards ? Nothing but misery for both of us, misery we never knew before.

MME DUQUESNOY (*staring*) : The saints preserve us——

HENRIETTE : And if we wait one day—even one hour—she will throw us away as creatures done with ! Why should our fate concern her any more ? Which is better—to go ourselves or be shamed and driven out ?

MME DUQUESNOY (*helpless*) : Neither, my child, neither !

HENRIETTE : One of them it must be !

MME DUQUESNOY : Oh ! Oh !

HENRIETTE : And now will you come away ?

MME DUQUESNOY : But the millions——

HENRIETTE : Everything is lost already ! Do you mean to wait for the reckoning ?

MME DUQUESNOY : No—No !

HENRIETTE : Then will you come with me now ?

MME DUQUESNOY : But she told us we had nothing to fear !

HENRIETTE : Until we had fulfilled her purpose ! After that she made no promises ! Now can you see what is in store ?

MME DUQUESNOY : Yes, Henriette—yes ! Your poor mother is ready ! We had better go !

HENRIETTE : We want nothing but the cloaks we brought last night.

MME DUQUESNOY (*tearful*) : I know, my child. They are here !

[*She turns toward the hall on the right.*]

HENRIETTE : Quickly, mother !

MME DUQUESNOY : Yes—yes !

[HENRIETTE *pushes* MME DUQUESNOY *off stage*, and *follows*. Enter MME DE POMMERAYE, *meeting them in middle of stage*. MME DE POMMERAYE *ignores* MME DUQUESNOY, but *stands in the way of* HENRIETTE.

HENRIETTE : Too late !

MME DE POMMERAYE : Yes, too late ! Where were you going, both of you ?

HENRIETTE : Let me pass !

MME DE POMMERAYE : Not yet, my dove !

MME DUQUESNOY : This is our house—why do you enter it ?

MME DE POMMERAYE : I find you trying, vainly trying, to escape before worse happens to you.

MME DUQUESNOY : Oh, what have we done !

MME DE POMMERAYE : Once more you have put yourselves in my hands. (*Turning to HENRIETTE*) Am I right ?

[HENRIETTE *stares at her, swaying as if about to fall*.

MME DUQUESNOY (*with a step toward her*) : Henriette !

MME DE POMMERAYE (*barring her way*) : No !

MME DUQUESNOY : My child !

[MARQUIS's *voice upstairs*.

MARQUIS (*above*) : Henriette ! Henriette !

HENRIETTE (*cries out*) : Ah !

MME DE POMMERAYE : The girl was right—too late !

[MARQUIS *appears*

MARQUIS What are you doing here—and in that cloak? And Mathilde!

MME DE POMMERAY Your night watchman!

MARQUIS You—here!

MME DE POMMERAY In your house—and in time!

MARQUIS (*descending stairs*) * But—my dearest—my—

[MME DE POMMERAY *goes to* MARQUIS

MME DUQUESNOY Marquis—your lordship—I can explain everything! It was my daughter who thought it right to go—my daughter—oh how can I save her now!

MME DE POMMERAY Ask yourself that in the street! (*Advancing as MME DUQUESNOY retreats backward from her*) The Rue de Lille for choice!

MME DUQUESNOY Henriette!

[*She goes out hurriedly by the glass doors as maids enter from their quarters and the MARQUIS advances. HENRIETTE falls to the ground between his outstretched arms. The maids rush forward.*

MARQUIS Quickly the Marchioness! A couch—anywhere! Lift her gently. In there! What can possibly have happened?

MME DE POMMERAY I can tell you that!

MARQUIS What does this visit mean?

MME DE POMMERAY So early on the morning after! Only a woman's stroke of policy!

MARQUIS But Henriette—her mother—

MME DE POMMERAY One of the pair is gone already!

MARQUIS (*turning from her*) My wife is ill. I must go to her!

MME DE POMMERAYE : My news is pressing, too.

MARQUIS : What news ?

MME DE POMMERAYE : I met your wife, your marchioness, the future mother of your child—if I may pay you such a compliment——

[*She pauses.*]

MARQUIS : Well ?

MME DE POMMERAYE : —in the act of fleeing your house with her mother.

MARQUIS : Fleeing my house ?

MME DE POMMERAYE : Here, a moment ago.

MARQUIS : Ridiculous !

MME DE POMMERAYE : It would have been more so, had they stayed. You should know what was driving them out into merciful darkness !

MARQUIS (*seizing her wrist*) : What ?

MME DE POMMERAYE : The pangs of knowledge drove them ! Not conscience, but knowledge !

MARQUIS : Whom are you speaking of ?

MME DE POMMERAYE : Your precious bride and her procuress of a mother !

MARQUIS : How dare you——?

MME DE POMMERAYE : You ask me that—you, who have everything to fear ! You who stand quivering before a truth you can too well imagine !

MARQUIS : Speak !

MME DE POMMERAYE : Very well, you shall hear. Let us begin with Madame de Pommeraye Your dearest friend, who withstood every tempter on your account, until she made herself your mistress. Yes, made herself so, and in the face of a licentious world that mocked and mimicked her !

MARQUIS : But what has this to do—— ?

MME DE POMMERAYE Until one day, in your eyes, this mistress was no longer good enough ! You needed loftier companionship, in some world of taste and sentiment more fastidious than hers ! Until, yourself unique, you found your female counterpart ! You put aside the vulgar thought that such a paragon could be seduced like any other woman ! Until it came at last to marriage, and the great D'Arcy bed was made ready to receive—a common street girl !

MARQUIS (*screaming*) What !

MME DE POMMERAYE (*deliberately*) Henriette Duquesnoy, aged nineteen, registered under the name of Aisnon, at the address 14 Rue de Lille And there active in her trade for some months, indeed until she made your acquaintance You have only to ask for further particulars—if you desire them.

MARQUIS (*grasping the folds of an ancestral standard as if to cover himself*) And you knew you dared——

MME DE POMMERAYE An easy revenge perhaps, but contemptuous enough to be not unworthy of my birth and standing. Your own vanity greatly assisted its success—and your impressionable heart should not be forgotten I was helped also by a pair of most accomplished liars, who were never more convincing than when they deceived themselves as well as others Now the affair is over, I can strangle what is left of any personal feeling for you The dawn, I see, is here, and I wish you joy of your morning and your day.

MARQUIS (*involuntarily*) : Wait !

MME DE POMMERAYE With pleasure Your meeting with your bride will interest me deeply

MARQUIS (*abruptly*) No—leave my presence !

MME DE POMMERAYE : As you please. I need not warn you to beware of her, if she receives you—from force of habit—with open arms.

MARQUIS (*violently*) : Out !

[*She goes.*

The MARQUIS disentangles himself from his standard and goes after her on to the terrace, where he remains visible, staring. Then, laughing and weeping together, he stumbles back into the hall. Clutching for support, he reels upon a glass-covered table full of weapons. He raises its lid and seizes a pistol.

(*Beginning to load it*) So perish D'Arcy ! Dawn for others, night and the grave for me ! Darkness ! Oblivion ! Nothingness ! Vanish the dishonourable world ! (*He cocks the pistol.*) Let this ancestral weapon bring release ! (*He raises, then lowers it.*) But yet—not yet ! Not while such a creature lives ! To bear my name ! First perish infamy ! Vanish pollution ! Now time stand still ! Swing pendulum, in one relentless stroke ! Pause, Fate, for this eternal moment—while I destroy her body and my heart together ! And then no more, no more ! End life and being—that is the goal ! Earth upon us both ! But the same earth ? Hateful thought—must that be ? One purgatory or one hell—a common heaven perhaps ? No, no ! D'Arcy must be alone ! Untainted ! *Sans Pêché* ! (*He gathers fresh resolve to lift the weapon.*) No other way is possible—ah !

[HENRIETTE stands in the doorway. As the MARQUIS raises the pistol, she stretches out her arms crosswise. He lowers it, raises it again and lets it fall to his side. HENRIETTE sinks to her knees. A silence.]

HENRIETTE : Why does my lord forbear to kill me ? (*He hastily puts the pistol behind him.*) The grave stands ready—why not drag me to it by this hair of mine ? (*He makes a vague gesture of*

dissent.) I should be still My blood would ebb away without one murmur *(He retreats a step)* Must you first wring my shame from me? Must I confess before I am allowed to die? *(Kneels)* Oh, make an end of this body that longs only to return to dust! It is yours! The spirit that was mine is flown already! *(She comes nearer, still on her knees to him, and he retreats further)* An end! Make an end!

MARQUIS *(repulsing her)* Away!

HENRIETTE. Ah!

[With a low cry she slips to the ground. The MARQUIS looks down at her motionless figure then goes to the stair and mounts a step or two before turning again.]

MARQUIS Words! But could one of them be true? A single one? *(He approaches her again)* I was a tool held in a madwoman's vice. What must she have been? A monstrous revenge was taken on us both. On her—perhaps because she may have loved me? Is that possible? But why not? And now a jealous woman has her victory, are we to let her have her way to the end? As far as death itself? Death for us both! That must be her plan—nothing less! But is it for that I am a D'Arcy? *(Drawing himself up)* To die at a woman's bidding, after living in her power too long? Never! Never! *(He throws aside his weapon)*

HENRIETTE If I weep, never fear—I will not ask to be forgiven. Now that you can bear to look at me, it seems as if you hated and despised me less. Yet I know that is impossible! I had better go, before the tide of your fury rises again to overwhelm me. I could show you I am worthy of death—but not of loathing. I could answer all your reproaches except one that I lent myself willingly to this deception. I was a victim of a crime I could not share! Nevertheless, for that you have no right to pardon me.

Leave me only the hope that you will one day understand !

MARQUIS : Henriette !

HENRIETTE (*weeping still*) . If it were in my power, I would cast off the name and rank that I was made to steal from you. I guess the shame that you must feel, knowing that I bear them. And if I was forced into wronging you in spite of myself, I blame my own weakness far more than threats and stratagems of others. Do not think me evil—that is all I ask ! Even now I dare to lift my eyes to yours and speak from the heart ! Oh, if you could read in it my hatred of the vices of this world—which I must still call mine ! How gladly I would leave it, at this moment !

MARQUIS : No, no.

HENRIETTE : My life is stained but not my soul. In my own nature still I may be not unworthy of the honour you have shown me. And even before our marriage, had I been permitted to speak with you alone, I should have found courage to warn you of the fraud you have now discovered.

MARQUIS : Yes. I am sure of it !

HENRIETTE : I am ready for any fate you have in store for me now. Have me thrown into the street—I shall follow my mother gladly. Banish me to a convent or a prison-house, drive me to the ends of the earth if you are resolved to see me no more. I shall obey you. Neither your fortune nor your honour will be lost, for I consent to any penalty. You can offer the world a model of revenge that will make the spite of Mme de Pommeraye seem pitiful.

MARQUIS : Never !

HENRIETTE : But if outwardly we must still be united, then I obey you too ! Only I beg you to go far away from me ! Set a watch upon my

way of life. Think of me as the humblest of your servants. Give me the smallest corner of your house for dwelling. Bread and water will suffice me. I am a prisoner of your mercy !

[She embraces his knees. A long silence.]

MARQUIS : You have confessed and I know the truth. Then what am I to do but pardon you ? *(Raises her head.)* My own life has not been blameless. No, far from it ! But my ways I chose myself, they were not like yours the choice of others.

HENRIETTE *(burying her face in her hands again)* : Ah !

MARQUIS : You were the first woman to compel me to change them. That I must remember. And now I find I love the woman as I loved my foolish image of her. That is my confession, for which I blush as heartily as you for yours.

[She smiles at him.]

I see you smile at me.

HENRIETTE : Yes, yes !

MARQUIS : Rise up, my bride. Your place in my house is the true one, as every place must be that you adorn.

[She rises and embraces him.]

HENRIETTE : Ah, my dear one, what are you saying ?

MARQUIS : I am now contented in a state at which I should have laughed not long ago. Nor is my good fortune lessened by the knowledge that you are no longer the angel I imagined, but a human creature like myself. Now I see that our good Madame de Pommeraye, so far from taking a revenge, has done me the greatest service by bringing us together. There can be no imitators of such a union. The highest, the truest distinction is ours ! For by a miracle we

rise above our vanities and follies. On with your gown, while our trunks are packing !

HENRIETTE : Your world will look for us——

MARQUIS : But we shall be flown—and together !
When next we need it, then we can return.

HENRIETTE (*in his arms again*) : And until then ?

MARQUIS : We can be happy in finding ourselves.

HENRIETTE : Husband——

MARQUIS : Marchioness !

[*And perhaps, as the curtain falls, a peal of laughter from MME DE POMMFRAYE unseen.*]

THE END

YOUTH AT THE HELM

YOUTH AT THE HELM

*A Comedy
In Three Acts*

By
HUBERT GRIFFITH

Adapted from the German of
PAUL VULPIUS

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CHARACTERS

(in the order of their first appearance)

FITCH

WILLIAM

DOROTHY WILSON A typist

OFFICE BOY

RANDOLPH WARRENDER

AN OLD GENTLEMAN

CHAIRMAN OF THE
LONDON AND METRO-
POLITAN BANK

PONSONBY Its managing director

YVONNE The chairman's daughter

NICHOLSON }
HOLLMAN } Joint managers and
 members of the board

LORD FARLEY Chairman of the City In-
 dustrial Bank

ROBERTS Of the Board of Trade

SCENES

ACT I

An office in the London and Metropolitan Bank

ACT II

The board-room (or same as Act I)

ACT III

Same as Act I

This play was produced at the Globe Theatre
on 21st February, 1935, with the following cast -

<i>Randolph Warrender</i>	OWEN NARFS
<i>Chairman of the London and Metropolitan Bank</i>	O. B. CLARENCE
<i>Ponsonby</i>	ALASTAIR SIM
<i>Lord Farley</i>	C. M. HALLARD
<i>Fitch</i>	WALTER HUDD
<i>Dorothy Wilson</i>	KAY HAMMOND
<i>Yvonne</i>	ADELE DIXON

ACT I

The ante-room—half waiting-room, half secretary's room—of the London and Metropolitan Bank

An entrance (right) from the chairman's office. On the other side of the stage up L double doors leading to the inner offices. A smaller door, downstage L, to the managing director's office. Upstage, is a large, official table, with a smaller typist's table near it. Office furniture. Downstage, by way of suggesting hospitality to visitors, is a reasonably comfortable sofa

As the curtain goes up, MR. LAUNCELOT FITCH, private secretary to the chairman, is sitting finishing his breakfast (two rolls and a bottle of pasteurised milk). He is about thirty, the perfect type of young, pedantic, scholarship boy, bank employee, without a gleam of imagination or humour in him. He is dusting up the crumbs of the rolls aforementioned with his handkerchief, when the telephone rings

FITCH (*licks finger to pick up crumb—at the telephone*).
Hullo? Yes, London and Metropolitan Bank speaking. . . . Chairman's office. The chairman's not come down to the office yet. The vice-chairman? Nor him either. The directors? Not yet turned up. Who is here, then? No one.
(Pause) Oh, I'm here. . . . (*But he is too late. He hangs up and calls*) William! William!

WILLIAM (*a very old and decrepit commissionaire coming in from the corridor L 2*). 'Morning, Mr. Fitch. Anythin' the matter, Mr. Fitch?

FITCH Yes, there is something very much the matter. How often must I tell you not to put the telephone through here until . . .

WILLIAM Sorry. The girl on the switchboard's not got into action yet, and I thought . . .

FITCH (*cutting in unkindly*). Then you thought wrong! I've said before, until nine-thirty I'm here as a private individual—and as a private

individual I stay ! I get down to the office in good time so that I can eat my breakfast in peace, and sharpen my pencils without being distracted . . .

WILLIAM : Well, look here, can I give you a hand . . . ? (*He grabs at them.*)

FITCH (*snatching them away, scandalised*) : Get out, get out ! I won't have anyone messing about with my things ! And my pencils, too. (*He looks at them lovingly.*) My pencils . . . !

WILLIAM : Let's at least take the milk-bottle away, then. . . .

FITCH : You can if you are careful. Don't let it make a mess. (*In despair*) There . . . what did I say ? You've done it. (*Wiping the corner of the table with his handkerchief*) I pick up every crumb of my roll and butter—and you go and splash the milk about till you make my table look like a dairy farm.

WILLIAM (*politely*) : Mr. Fitch, how old are you. if there's no offence ?

FITCH : Thirty-two. . . . But what's that to you ?

WILLIAM : Aren't you, as one might say, a bit partic'lar for your age ?

FITCH : How dare you !

WILLIAM (*soothingly*) : There ! There ! There ! There ! I'm only Bill, the old commissionaire. I'm just coming on to the pension list. No one's going to fire me now. I say what I like, to who I like—even if it's the chairman himself . . . and he's not half a bad fellow.

[*He goes out L.2 with the breakfast tray.*]

FITCH (*staring after him*) : Scandalous ! Scandalous ! (*He sets about sharpening his pencils furiously.*)

[*Enter MISS DOROTHY WILSON, L.2, shorthand-typist—good-looking, and knows it. Hangs coat and hat in cupboard L.*]

DOROTHY : Good morning, Mr Fitch-Fitch !

FITCH : Good morning, Miss Wilson.

DOROTHY : Why is it that nine-thirty on a Monday morning never feels like nine-thirty on a Thursday morning ?

FITCH . Every working day of the week is the same to me.

DOROTHY (*unpacking her little portfolio*) Isn't it like life to see you sitting there already, fit for work and bursting to get at it ? Isn't it awful to see you sharpening away at your little pencils—as if the salvation of the bank depended on it ! Isn't it . . . beautifully “ Fitch-Fitch ” ? (*She litches up stockings*)

FITCH (*loftily*) I beg your pardon, Miss Wilson. The bank, thank God, doesn't need any more “ saving ” We're about at rock-bottom now, so nothing much more can happen to us

DOROTHY Then why go on sharpening ? (*She comes over to his table and scatters them*)

FITCH (*collecting them again*) I sharpen my pencils and keep my desk in order because it expresses my inward conviction The worse the confusion in the great world outside, the more must we keep our own part of it—our own small section—in order

DOROTHY When you talk that sort of stuff, d'you know that you make me want to kill you ?

FITCH (*patronisingly*) It's all one to me, Miss Wilson.

DOROTHY Yes—you're quite right It wouldn't be *bad enough* for you ! I'll tell you what—I'd like to mess up your pencils—or knock your ink-pot over !

FITCH . Please—please —Miss Wilson.

DOROTHY . Or . . . but don't get afraid I won't do it ! D'you know, there's something almost

touching about the way you keep that desk of yours ! You're not a bad cove, otherwise !

FITCH (*stiffly*) : How kind of you !

DOROTHY : Funny . . . we've been working long enough in the office together, and yet we never seem to have got thoroughly friendly.

FITCH (*loftily*) : That is very easily explained. You stand for chaos, I stand for order. I stand for Organisation, you stand for Anarchy . . . ! (*Unbending*) But a rather attractive sort of Anarchy, I sometimes think. . . .

DOROTHY (*leaping on to the settee, in ecstasy*)
Slotty. Slotty—do you adore me ?

FITCH : Don't call me "Slotty"—my name's Launcelot. And I adore no one who lolls about this office.

DOROTHY : Why are you staring at my legs then ?

FITCH : As it happens, I wasn't staring at your legs as legs ; I'm merely noticing that you've got a ladder.

DOROTHY (*hitching up her skirt still higher*) Where is it ? And aren't you a stick ! One gives you a perfectly good knee to look at, and all you notice is a ladder ! How am I ever going to marry you ?

FITCH (*astounded*) : Marry me . . . ?

[*The OFFICE BOY looks in L. 2.*]

OFFICE BOY : 'Morning, sir. Will you take the post in ?

FITCH (*backing away from DOROTHY*) : Have you wiped your boots well ?

BOY : Don't I always ?

FITCH : You may come in then.

BOY (*crossing R. to small table downstage*) : The usual. . . . And a few registered 'uns.

FITCH (*aghast*) · But good heavens don't put them there, mar ! Don't you see there's room there ? Use your eyes.

BOY It's all the same to me, sir Sign for 'em, please, sir

FITCH Carbon underneath properly ?

BOY (*quizzically*) Always is, sir

[FITCH *signs*

Happy now, sir ?

FITCH (*signing*) Perfectly, thank you You can depart.

BOY (*on the move*) Thank you, sir Good morning, sir 'Morning, miss Saw you the other night, Miss Wilson

DOROTHY Did you now ? Where ?

BOY At the Pally

FITCH " Pally " ?

BOY de Donse

FITCH Palais de Danse ? Indeed ! That might be all right for *you* (*To DOROTHY*) But for *you*, Miss Wilson

BOY I like the band there, don't you, Miss Wilson ?

FITCH (*impatiently*) I told you you can depart

BOY Oh, yes That's right

[BOY *goes out perkily L 2*

FITCH Employees of the London and Metropolitan do *not* dance at Palais de Danses, Miss Wilson

DOROTHY (*with venom*) Oh, bad luck for them ! I suppose they find it a bit above their class ?

FITCH And who were you there with, anyway ?

DOROTHY That would be telling.

FITCH Someone in the bank ?

DOROTHY : Little boys should only know what's good for them. I'll tell you one thing, though — it wasn't a bun at a Corner House afterwards, and home on separate buses, as it would have been with you . . . so there.

FITCH . That will do, Miss Wilson. It is now nine-thirty Office hours have started. Please get on with your work. Palais de Danse indeed ! Apparently pleasure means more to you than work You had better get on sorting the post , and not in here . . in there. And do me the favour of not throwing the envelopes all over the place.

DOROTHY : Oh, don't fuss ! From nine-thirty to ten you are quite the little managing director but after ten it's " Yes, Mr Ponsonby," " No Mr. Ponsonby," " Coming, Mr. Ponsonby " . .

[She goes out with the letters, case, and letter basket]

FITCH . No poise, that girl. . . .

[He bends over his table and begins studiously going through papers RANDOLPH WARRINDER slides easily into the room. He is self-assured and suave in manner. His clothes are a dream. He has a quiet proud round, and thorough inspection of, the room before FITCH becomes aware of him. He takes his time before speaking.]

WARRENDER : Good morning !

FITCH (*hostile*) : Good morning You want somebody ?

WARRENDER (*beaming*) : Only you !

FITCH : But . . . ? (*Astonished*) Warrender ? Randolph Warrender ? How on earth did you get here ?

WARRENDER : Actually—I got in through the door !

FITCH . Don't be silly ! Didn't you see on the

door, "No admittance except by appointment"?

WARRENDER Slottily! You're just the same mutt that you used to be at Westminster!

FITCH: If you've only come here to insult me . . .

WARRENDER: I don't want to insult you. Funny enough, I was always rather fond of you. You're just the same little prize-boy that delighted all the masters' hearts (*He hangs his hat and sticks on a peg R Suddenly business-like*) Look, I'm here because I've got something particularly important to say to you.

FITCH: Wouldn't it have done at lunch-time? Office hours have started now—

WARRENDER: Sorry! It couldn't wait. (*Sharply*) So now—pay attention to what I say. Give me a cigarette. (*He lights a cigarette and throws match carelessly into the middle of the carpet.*)

FITCH: You're talking just as though you were my boss!

WARRENDER (*ominously*) Yes.

FITCH: Randolph! In the ash-tray, *please*, and not on the carpet. (*He picks up the match-end.*)

WARRENDER (*tapping the table smartly with a pencil*): Now let's get to business!

FITCH: Oh, you cad! You've broken the point.

WARRENDER: Well, you can sharpen it again! Now listen. I'm here because I've been calculating—that in three weeks from now I shall have starved!

FITCH: But haven't you got a job?

WARRENDER: I have not, and can't get one! These days it's out of the question! I've thought of everything, possible and impossible, from

cat-burglary to chicken-farming. Nothing doing—anywhere.

FITCH : Bad luck ! What are you going to do about it ?

WARRENDER : For the moment I'm one of Europe's unemployed. A beggar—though I'm not in rags ! A potential corpse from starvation—though I still eat myself sick every day.

FITCH : How d'you do that ?

WARRENDER : It's simple. Polite society won't give me bread—but it gives me cheese straws and cocktails. Every day I'm asked to some cocktail-party or other. . . . If it goes on, I'll soon be living entirely on cocktails and cheese-straws. But oh ! for a steak and a tankard of ale.

FITCH : But cocktails and cheese straws are better than nothing

WARRENDER : Not altogether ! They're not so bad for the stomach—but what about the soul ? Gosh ! that's a different proposition ! An empty stomach can always look after itself—but what does one do for an empty soul ? I was just about at the end of my tether when—suddenly the other day something happened that filled me with new hope and faith.

FITCH : What was it ?

WARRENDER : I was walking down Bruton Street one day when I met——

FITCH (*hopefully*) : A pretty girl !

WARRENDER : No—a pantechnicon ! Someone was moving.

FITCH : From one house to another !

WARRENDER : Brilliant, Slotty ! The pavement was piled up with furniture, and most of it had to go back into the pantechnicon. The workmen were heaving it about and shouting, you know

as they do, "Heave-ho!" and "To you," and "From me." And suddenly I found I couldn't stand it any longer. . . I saw a great chest lying on the pavement in front of me. Before I knew what I was doing, I found that I had heaved it up and slapped it back into the furniture-van! Gosh! It was a lovely feeling. After years, to have something to do again! I grabbed hold of another great chest . . . (*He grabs one end of the bank's settee to demonstrate.*)

FITCH: Please, Randolph . . .

WARRENDER: It's all right, Slotty. A couple of armchairs, one end of a piano, half a side-board . . . I turned to and I worked away . . . I worked away—quite forgetting that no one had even invited me to do anything of the sort . . . !

FITCH: And they let you?

WARRENDER: *And how!* After ten minutes everyone was taking it for granted that I was on the job, and, as a matter of fact, began to find me absolutely indispensable.

FITCH: I'd like to know what happened afterwards—

WARRENDER: Very simple again! When the job was done, the foreman came up to me and slipped me a bob. A round and lovely silver shilling! The first coin that for years and years I had earned with the sweat of my brow. . . .

FITCH: Marvellous!

WARRENDER: *Now* do you catch on? At last I'd sent in my resignation to the Out-of-Works' Club. I had risen superior to the World-Crisis! And how had I done it? Not because I'd asked for work, but because I'd rushed at it and *grabbed* work—like that (*grabbing* FITCH).

FITCH: I see. Now, I suppose, you'll keep your eye open for pantehnicons?

WARRENDER : No, Slotty, not so good. Think again ! What can be done in a little way can be done in a bigger. I'm here this morning because—I propose to start to work in this bank !

FITCH (*staggered*) : Here, in the bank . . . ?

WARRENDER (*calm*) : Exactly !

FITCH : But you can't do that ! (*As though talking to a pure madman*) But—you're not an employee of the bank !

WARRENDER : Who cares ! Whose is this desk ?

FITCH : It's mine. (*He attempts to sit in his chair*)

WARRENDER (*forestalling him*) : Then from now on it's mine.

FITCH . Randolph, you can't—you mustn't . .

WARRENDER (*warningly*) : Slotty !

FITCH . You're mad as hatter !

WARRENDER : That's just where you're wrong ! I'm becoming strikingly and acutely sane. I appoint myself, here and now, to the staff of the bank ! And, again without anyone actually entreating me, I'm going to begin work.

FITCH : My dear fellow, you're utterly deranged. I think I'd better . . .

WARRENDER (*coarsely*) : All you've got to do is to do nothing ! Just behave as if it were the most natural thing in the world to see me working at this desk.

FITCH : I can't.

WARRENDER : Oh !

FITCH : No, no, Randolph. I know you used to stop them bullying me at school, but I won't allow this.

WARRENDER : Oh ?

FITCH : No.

WARRENDER : Oh, very well. (*Towering calmly over him*) Then your pencils, the little stool you're sitting on, even you—will be pitched out of the window together !

FITCH : Will they ? You think you can terrorise me . . . (*Pause.*) Well, perhaps you can ! But the first of the bosses that comes into the room will simply ask all about you.

WARRENDER (*airily*) : Possibly. But I doubt it. The London and Metropolitan Bank has six hundred and twenty-eight employees ! Do you think it's a foregone conclusion that it's going to notice one more ?

FITCH : Do you know any details of the place ?

WARRENDER : Before I came here I learnt the whole darn bank off by heart ! The name of the chairman, the vice-chairman, the list of directors, the whole perishing organisation ! I even know that the old commissionaire in the corridor out there, William, usually goes by the name of Uncle Bill . . .

FITCH : What good's that going to do you ?

WARRENDER : A great deal. It's got me in here. I've got to give the impression that I've been at home here for years. My whole plan's built up on that ! Here in this place the whole day long business is going on—City affairs, foreign transactions—clearances, acceptances—something new the whole time ! Do you think that in the middle of this terrific hurly-burly it's going to occur to anyone to stop and ask, "Hullo—what are *you* doing here ?"

FITCH : If they don't to-day, they will to-morrow. If not to-morrow, then in ten days' time.

WARRENDER : Wrong again ! They'll ask at once or not at all ! In ten days' time it would be absolutely normal to find me sitting here ! If

I *weren't* here they'd ask, "Where the devil's Warrender gone to?"

FITCH : What an imagination you've got !

WARRENDER (*complacently*) . Listen ! I make no prophecies. . . . It's possible that in five minutes from now I'll have been thrown out on my ear ! It's *possible*, mind you ! But, again, it's equally possible that I'll have won the trick—that I'll be a fully fledged employee on the staff at the bank.

FITCH (*in despair*) And if that happens—good Lord !

WARRENDER . What's the matter ?

FITCH : Damn it, I've touched the bell by accident ! Get out quick, and hide.

WARRENDER . What for ? An old commissionaire ? Don't be childish.

[WILLIAM comes in from the corridor.

WILLIAM . You rang for something, sir ?

FITCH : By mistake, William . An accident.

WILLIAM : Funny ! You don't make that sort of mistake often.

WARRENDER : Hullo, Uncle Bill ! How's the wife this morning ? In the pink, I hope ?

WILLIAM : Very nicely, thank you, sir. Or at least a bit better. She still feels a touch of rheumatics—up here. (*He indicates the small of his back.*)

WARRENDER (*to WILLIAM*) . Lard—give it a rubbing with lard—some good clarified lard . That's better than anything, rubbed well in . And look here ! When they're asking for me, tell them that from to-day I'm working here, in close touch with the chairman.

WILLIAM (*eyeing him doubtfully*) : All right, I'll tell 'em.

WARRENDER (*in sorrow*) : William . . . what's this ? You're looking at me as if you'd forgotten my name.

WILLIAM : Sorry, sir . . . but these days—I'm getting on now—there are so many of you about these days.

WARRENDER : I'm Mr. Warrender—Randolph Warrender—and don't forget it again ! (*Sits at desk.*) There's a lot to do this morning.

WILLIAM (*stammering*) : But . . . of course. My mistake . . . of course . . . of course !

WARRENDER : Now go and bring me my office coat, please, from downstairs.

FITCH (*startled*) : What's that ?

WARRENDER : My ordinary alpaca working coat ! I left it down in the mortgage department last night. In the cloak-room, hanging on the third peg.

WILLIAM : Right, sir ; right, sir.

WARRENDER : Grey alpaca ! You'll spot it at once. Buck up, William.

WILLIAM : All right, all right. As fast as you like. (*Turning as he makes for the door*) Clarified lard, did you say ?

WARRENDER : That's what I said ! Now hurry up, William.

[WILLIAM *departs*.

FITCH (*still staggered*) : What's all this ? Have you really got a coat here ?

WARRENDER : No . . . I haven't really got a coat here.

FITCH : What's the point of sending William for one.

WARRENDER : He *must* get used to the idea that I belong here. The old boy will go about from

office to office saying he's looking for "Warrender's alpaca coat." Marvellous ! I begin to "be somebody" in the bank. They get used to hearing my name.

FITCH : But—just because you've pulled the leg of an old commissionaire, who's lived for years on his own stupidity——

WARRENDER : That's why he's still a commissionaire ! If he'd lived on the stupidity of other people he'd be chairman of the bank by now.

FITCH : Good Lord, the chairman ! He'll be here any second now. And, if it occurs to him, he'll ask where you come from.

WARRENDER (*simply*) : I come from the mortgage department.

FITCH : But if the mortgage department asks you—— ?

WARRENDER : Then I come from the clearance accounts. . . . (*Moves R.C*) My technique shall be that of the cuttlefish. Do you happen to know the technique of a cuttlefish ?

FITCH : No.

WARRENDER : It's very interesting. When he's attacked he squirts inky darkness around him ! Every department can believe that I belong to another department. The confidential clerks can be made to think that I'm working with the managing director. The managing director can be led to believe that I'm working with the chairman. And so on. By the by, the chairman will be *particularly* delighted to see me here.

FITCH : He'll be delighted ?

WARRENDER : Once again, *and how* !

FITCH : But why ?

WARRENDER : I've been shadowing him for weeks ! At concerts, at the play, in the City, at

the Queen's Hall. . . Occasionally I wave a hand at him. . . .

FITCH : And what does he do ?

WARRENDER : He waves a hand back ! Rather timidly. But he waves ! (*He demonstrates.*)

FITCH : Have you got anything on him, as they say ? Is he afraid of you ?

WARRENDER : He's not afraid of me, but of his memory ! It'll be an absolute godsend to him to see me sitting here—to know that he's really identified me all right at last—as one of his employees !

FITCH . All right ! We'll grant, then, that you have luck to smuggle yourself in here for a bit. But what good does that do you ? You're not on the salary list, and you'll get no salary.

WARRENDER (*airily*) : That's my luck again ! If I've got no salary, at least nobody's going to reduce it.

FITCH : That's true enough !

WARRENDER : Better than that ! If I'm not on the official books of the bark, I can't even be sacked ! If the whole lot of you were sacked from here, I alone would remain in all my glory !

FITCH : Still without a salary ?

WARRENDER : Yes . . . still without a salary.

FITCH : Well . . . what do you propose to work at ? You've got no sort of department or connections.

WARRENDER : I can begin writing business letters.

FITCH : To whom ?

WARRENDER : I haven't the least idea !

FITCH : What about ?

WARRENDER : I haven't the least idea ! And what does it matter anyhow ? Every letter I

write will bring back a reply—and then one replies to the reply ! Then a reply to that—and then again a reply to the reply to the reply ! By the twentieth letter or so, there's not a soul who can remember accurately what the original letter was about !

FITCH : There's something in *that* !

WARRENDER : What to-day may be a simple "letter" bursts forth to-morrow as the beginning of a business transaction.

FITCH : Who's the first going to be to ?

WARRENDER : I'll leave it to Fate. . . (*Rises.*) Where's the *Stock Exchange Year-Book*, where's the *Directory of Directors* ? (*He is rifling the shelves at the back of the room.*)

FITCH : The *Directory of Directors* is always kept here

WARRENDER : I'll open it where it likes and take the first name ! (*Takes pencil from FITCH's pocket.*) Thank you. (*Turning over leaves*) Good ! Good ! Here's something for us ! Peter Kubinsky, Walton-on-the-Naze, Cement and Tilt Works, Steel and Concrete Constructional Engineers ! Exquisite ! Let's write to them !

FITCH : To what particular person ?

WARRENDER : It doesn't matter a hoot ! Wait a minute, though—what's the bank that does the greatest amount of business with us ?

FITCH : Us ?

WARRENDER : Us.

FITCH : The City Industrial.

WARRENDER : Then I'll write a line to the chairman of the City Industrial Bank—to old Lord Farley.

FITCH : Do you remember his son—Stephen Farley ?

WARRENDER : I know he was the biggest poop in the school.

FITCH : " City and Industrial Farley " they call him.

WARRENDER : He's a fool ! I've heard a lot about him. . . .

FITCH : He may be a fool, but he's going to marry our chairman's daughter.

WARRENDER : Poor girl. Then I'd better get going on old Farley.

FITCH : What are you going to tell him about Kubinsky and their tile-works ?

WARRENDER : Anything as long as it's enigmatic enough ! The whole point is that he should not know too much about it ! A couple of letters flying about here and there—and in a few days I'll be the only man in the bank who knows what the " Kubinsky affair " really amounts to ! I'll be asked to be the bank's representative in the affair Kubinsky. . . .

FITCH : You know, your simplicity is incredible—

WARRENDER : It's only the simple who inherit the earth ! (*Sharply*) Where's the typist ?

FITCH : In there—in the directors' office.

WARRENDER : What's her name ?

FITCH : Dorothy—Miss Wilson.

WARRENDER : Fine ! (*Shouting at the door*) Miss Wilson—Dorothy dear. (*Back to desk and sits.*)

FITCH : What are you calling the girl ?

WARRENDER : But isn't she a dear ?

FITCH : You've never even seen her !

WARRENDER : Slotty, you *will* not remember that I've worked here for years !

[DOROTHY comes into the office.

DOROTHY (*surprised*) : I beg your pardon !

WARRENDER : Good morning. Good morning !
How are you this morning ?

DOROTHY : Who, me ?

WARRENDER : Lovely to see you looking so fit ! Schoolgirl complexion. Clear-eyed and enchanting. (*Rapidly, in his most business-like manner*) Take two copies of this. please !

DOROTHY (*still amazed*) : What are you talking about ?

WARRENDER (*calmly*) : Two copies—or, rather, the letter itself and a carbon.

DOROTHY : But I don't know what——.

WARRENDER (*offended*) : Dolly, my treasure . . . do you mean to say you really don't remember me ! Your most faithful adorer. Kubinsky . . .

DOROTHY : Kubinsky ?

WARRENDER : Warrender, I mean ! I don't know my own name this morning ! Warrender, from the mortgage department . . .

DOROTHY (*doubtfully*) : I suppose so.

WARRENDER : But you remember a good deal less about me than I do about you. Do you think I could forget that charming laugh of yours in a hurry ?

[*She smiles.*]

Yes, that's the one. Or those lovely teeth ? I've always said you had much the best teeth of any girl in the bank !

DOROTHY (*beaming and becoming friendly*) : Well, let's get it clear, shall we ? A letter and a carbon, or a letter and two carbons ? It's all one to me. (*Sits.*)

[WARRENDER *sets a chair for her.*]

WARRENDER : Quite comfy there, Dolly ?

FITCH (*beginning to chafe*) : Look here, is this work, or is it a petting-party? Can I remind you that it's office hours?

WARRENDER : Thank you, old boy ! Thank you !

FITCH : Why are you thanking me ?

WARRENDER : For reminding me that work comes before pleasure. (*Begins to dictate with incredible rapidity.*) Now . . . "To the Right Hon. the Lord Farley . . . Chairman, the City Industrial Bank, Throgmorton Street . . ."

DOROTHY (*repeating*) : " . . . morton Street . . ."

WARRENDER : "My very dear Farley . . ."
(*Looks at FITCH.*) " . . . Will you allow me once again, after the six months' interval, to draw your attention to that Kubinsky affair . . ."

DOROTHY : The *what* affair ?

WARRENDER : Kubinsky ! (*Pronouncing every syllable*) Ku-bin-sky ! With a final "y" at the end—not an "i." Pay particular attention to that name. You're likely to hear a good deal more about it in the future.

FITCH : Apparently my services are not required.

[*As FITCH storms out of the door in fury, he encounters and cannons into a little OLD GENTLEMAN in shabby clothes who is on the point of entering.*]

OLD GENTLEMAN (*humbly*) : Excuse me, gentlemen——

FITCH : Who the hell d'you want ?

OLD GENTLEMAN : Will the chairman—— ?

FITCH : What, again ! The chairman's seeing nobody to-day !

OLD GENTLEMAN : But couldn't you—— ?

FITCH : Over and above that—can't you even

read ? There, outside the door " No Admittance except by Appointment " ?

OLD GENTLEMAN But I thought . I came on rather important business

FITCH Rules are rules ! This isn't a pub it's an office ! By the by, what was the business *re* ?

OLD GENTLEMAN I made so bold as to think . . the job of a night-watchman—

FITCH Sorry ! There are no jobs going for anyone !

OLD GENTLEMAN Who ought I to write to ?

FITCH I don't know and I don't care

OLD GENTLEMAN But can't you really—?

FITCH (*cutting him short*) What's more, you're in the way and I've got work to do—

WARRENDER This, sir, is a place of toil ! It is a bank—an institution needing endless responsibility

OLD GENTLEMAN (*to WARRENDER*) But won't you even take my name and address ?

FITCH Good morning to you, sir, good morning ! No time at all !

[*Pushes him out and slams the door in his face*]

WARRENDER Slotty . look here, are you always so beastly to people ?

DOROTHY Beastly ! Lord, he had his best manners on ! You ought to hear him when he's trying to be really beastly !

FITCH (*to DOROTHY—firmly*) I'd like to know, Miss Wilson, how you presume to criticise the behaviour—the perfectly correct behaviour— of a bank official who happens to be senior to you ! (*Vulgarly*) And then look at your own fingers . . !

DOROTHY What's the matter with my fingers ?

FITCH : You've written one letter so far, and they're black with ink.

DOROTHY (*warmly*) : If you don't like 'em, you needn't kiss 'em any more !

FITCH : In office hours, Miss Wilson, we'll forget these erotic passages.

WARRENDER (*jumping up*) : Slotty, Slotty, please. This isn't a pub, as you've reminded us already. Also you happen to be talking to by far the best shorthand-typist in the City——

FITCH (*exultantly*) : Much you know of her. You wait till you see her spelling mistakes !

WARRENDER : She's never made a mistake in any letter of mine.

DOROTHY : Of course I haven't. (*To FITCH*) I keep that for *you* ! Never for Mr. Warrender ! He's worth working for !

WARRENDER : Thank you, Dorothy. But where were we ?

DOROTHY : " To draw your attention to that Kubinsky affair."

WARRENDER : " Our original plans seem to have come to nothing—which is all the more remarkable as you, from your side of the business, seemed to be taking it up with the greatest enthusiasm." Not going too fast, am I ?

DOROTHY : Not at all, Mr. Warrender.

WARRENDER (*rises, crosses behind DOROTHY*) : " As it has now come to the fore again, may I beg you not to withdraw your valuable support ? From now on our operations have been placed in the experienced hands of Randolph Warrender ! " (*In his ordinary tone*) Underline that.

FITCH (*bitterly*) : Yes, underline it !

WARRENDER : " Who will place his valuable knowledge at your disposal during the transaction. Yours ever, with the friendliest greetings

. . . etc., etc." (*Patting DOROTHY's shoulder*)
Capital, Dorothy ! A splendid piece of work on
your part. (*Leading her to door.*)

DOROTHY : Very good of you to say so ! (*Archly*)
Wouldn't I be glad if I had a little more work
to do for you ! You're new here in the chair-
man's office, aren't you ?

WARRENDER : But it took me years in the bank
to get here ! Good-bye to you, Dolly ! Hurry
up with that letter, will you ?

[DOROTHY goes out

FITCH : Look here, whether you'll end up in a
convict prison, or a lunatic asylum—

WARRENDER (*enchanted with himself*) : Who cares !
My first letter—my first business letter—has
seen the light of day !

FITCH : And who do you think's going to sign
that drivel before it goes out ?

WARRENDER : I don't know ! Someone'll sign
it, that's a certainty.

[*An electric buzzer rings twice somewhere.*

FITCH : Great heavens ! Run for your life ! The
chairman.

WARRENDER (*keyed up*) : Not I ! Now for the
tussle ! Pull yourself together. Where's that
damned letter ? Miss Wilson, Miss Wilson. (*He
dashes after her into her office.*)

[FITCH, much flurried, runs to the door and opens
it. The CHAIRMAN, a kindly, middle-aged man who
has never remembered anything accurately in his life,
comes and passes through to his office.

CHAIRMAN : Good morning . . . let the directors
know I'm here, Fitch. I've got to be away again
in half an hour.

FITCH : Certainly, sir. Certainly, sir.

CHAIRMAN : Wait a bit. (*Vaguely*) There's some-
thing I wanted to say. Oh, yes . . . my daughter's

calling for me. . . . When she arrives, keep her here, will you? Anything important happened this morning?

FITCH : No, sir, the morning has been devoid of incident.

CHAIRMAN : Hasn't been a telephone message, has there?

FITCH : No, sir.

CHAIRMAN : Nuisance. I don't know how people can be so unbusiness-like. I shall never play off my handicap.

[WARRENDER returns with his letter.

Have they got that mortgage business through for me?

FITCH : Yes, sir, it's on your desk.

CHAIRMAN : Oh, on my desk, is it? Oh! thank you.

[He is about to enter his room when WARRENDER slips in front of him and says in his coolest and most man-of-the-world manner

WARRENDER : Just one second, sir! There's something that needs urgent signature.

CHAIRMAN : My signature?

WARRENDER : Yes, sir.

CHAIRMAN . What is it?

WARRENDER : The letter about that Kubinsky business. . . .

CHAIRMAN : Kubinsky business?

WARRENDER : Yes, you gave orders last week, sir.

CHAIRMAN : I did?

WARRENDER : Yes, sir.

CHAIRMAN : The Kubinsky business?

WARRENDER : Yes, sir.

[There is a long pause.

The CHAIRMAN rubs his forehead worriedly.

CHAIRMAN : I suppose it's all right. (*He signs quickly, looking hard at WARRENDER.*) Ah, at last I know who you are ! Who'd have thought it ? Well, well.

[He goes laughing into his office.]

FITCH : Phew ! My world's collapsing !

[WARRENDER bumps him, shows signature.]

The chairman's signed that drivel.

WARRENDER : The chairman signs all the drivel that's put in front of him. It's his profession.

FITCH : We can't—we mustn't. It's fraud ! It's swindling !

WARRENDER (*folding letter*) : On the contrary. . . . It regularises the position ! In the old days, if a king called a colonel " General " by accident, the chap became automatically a general ! The chairman's signed something, by accident, to say that the Kubinsky business is in my hands—and I automatically become the bank's representative in the matter ! And, by the same token, on the bank staff.

[WILLIAM comes in, much out of breath, holding an enormous alpaca coat.]

WILLIAM : Here we are, Mr. Warrender, your jacket !

FITCH (*rising—staggered*) : What's that ?

WARRENDER (*disconcerted*) : My jacket ! You found it all right ?

WILLIAM (*pleased with himself*) : I did though ! But it wasn't where you said it was.

WARRENDER : Wasn't it ?

WILLIAM : No.

WARRENDER : No, no, of course—I remembered later—stupid of me.

WILLIAM (*beaming*) : But I went through all the

lockers till I grabbed it, as you might say. I asked everyone till I found it.

WARRENDER : Well, thank you so much. You've done me a better service than you know.

[He holds it up against him. It was made for an immensely fat man, and hangs on WARRENDER like the folds of an elephant's skin.]

WILLIAM : Bit roomy, ain't it ?

WARRENDER : Yes, I always have them cut that way. Hang it up, Fitch.

[FITCH hangs it up.]

Now, William, take this letter ; enter it in the letter-book, register it, insure it, and push it off. But look sharp about it. *(At telephone)* Hullo. Get me the Board of Trade, please.

FITCH : Board of Trade ?

WARRENDER : The Permanent Under-Secretary.

FITCH : Permanent Under-Secretary ?

WARRENDER : Well, trade isn't trade these days unless the Government has a finger in it.

WILLIAM : Register it, insure it, and . . .

WARRENDER : That's it, William, but buck up. Buck up !

WILLIAM : That's it. " Buck up. Buck up." We must all do it. Since you've been here, sir, you've certainly got things going.

WARRENDER : Hurry up, William.

[WILLIAM shuffles off quickly.]

FITCH : You Kreuger !

WARRENDER *(into telephone)* : Hullo. Board of Trade ? Give me the Permanent Under-Secretary. . . . Who ? . . . Armstrong. . . . Oh, you'll do. Good morning, my dear man. It's Warrender—Randolph Warrender, of the London and Metropolitan Bank, speaking. Now look

here, Armstrong, there's something you can do for me. I want you to ask Sir Walter to have a word with our chairman . . . yes, right away. . . It's about that Kubinsky matter K-U-B-insky. Yes, yes, he'll know all about it. . . He's there. . . . Good, I'll put him through right away. . . . Oh, and look here, Armstrong, if he wants any details afterwards, tell him to ring up Warriender Cheerio, old Armstrong. .
(*On the chairman's telephone*) You're through, sir
(*To Fitch, in an almost overawed whisper*) They're through !

FITCH : Do you know them all there, then ?

WARRENDER Never seen Armstrong in my life.

FITCH : But—to call him “ dear man ”—— ?

WARRENDER (*simply*) : I've got an awfully friendly disposition

FITCH : Portland or Wormwood Scrubbs for you

WARRENDER Neither, I think ! The bank's soon going to need me very badly ! There's the Secretary of the Board of Trade hard at it on the telephone to the chairman ! Neither of them has the *least* idea what they're talking about and I'm the only man in the whole bank who's posted in the—non-existent—Kubinsky transaction.

WILLIAM (*at the door*) : The managing director Mr. Fitch.

[*He goes out*]

FITCH : Now we're done. *He* knows every ink-pot in the whole place ! Here's where you really get out !

WARRENDER Nonsense ! He's got his weak spot like all the rest. The chairman can't stand him ! He's the only director that the chairman can't get on with Am I right ?

FITCH: Just for that, he'll fire you out all the quicker!

[The MANAGING DIRECTOR enters. He is a furious, aggressive, and thoroughly unpleasant character.]

DIRECTOR: 'Morning. (He strides straight across to the chairman's office.)

WARRENDER 'coldly, as though to a stranger': Where are you going, please?

DIRECTOR (astounded): I beg your pardon?

WARRENDER (icily): I said, where are you going?

DIRECTOR: In to the chairman.

WARRENDER: For the moment, utterly impossible!

DIRECTOR (scandalised): What . . . ?

WARRENDER (rising): The chairman is at the moment engaged in a confidential conversation with the Board of Trade—apropos the affair Kubinsky. Please sit down. Cigarette?

DIRECTOR (at a loss): A cigarette . . . ? (He sits down heavily.) I suppose so. . . . (He takes a cigarette with bad grace.)

WARRENDER (sharply): Mr. Fitch, can't you give the managing director a match?

FITCH (shivering): Me? A match? All right! (He gives it with a shaking hand.)

DIRECTOR (savagely, to FITCH): You've burnt me, you booby!

FITCH: I'm frightfully sorry, sir. (He shudders back into his seat.)

WARRENDER: Excuse me. (He steps across the DIRECTOR's legs and says sharply to FITCH) By the by, Mr. Fitch . . . I want the last year's balance sheet of the Kubinsky factory. Get it, please.

[FITCH goes out.]

(To the DIRECTOR, abruptly) This matter's getting

almost out of my control. The chairman's pressing on with it. I must collect the whole of the material. (*He tears a paper away from under the DIRECTOR's elbow*) Excuse me.

DIRECTOR (*a little flurried*) . Of course, of course But might I ask—— ?

WARRENDER : Where I come from ? Warrender's my name—Randolph Warrender . I've been sent for special duty with the chairman.

DIRECTOR (*searching his memory*) Warrender . . '

[WARRENDER nods.

Randolph ?

WARRENDER . Of course.

DIRECTOR (*with no conviction*) : Of course, of course. . .

WARRENDER I'll let the chairman know you're here as soon as possible.

DIRECTOR (*wounded to the heart*) . You'll let the chairman know I'm here ! (*He searches his memory again*) Warrender . . . ?

WARRENDER And now, may I ask, sir, what's your own opinion of this Kubinsky transaction ?

DIRECTOR Kubinsky transaction ? What on earth is the Kubinsky transaction ?

WARRENDER : Oh, I see—you're not actually familiar with it ?

DIRECTOR : I am not ! I'll be very glad if you'll tell me.

WARRENDER (*decisively*) : I'm sorry to say I can't.

DIRECTOR : Why not ?

WARRENDER : It's the chairman's affair (*With a certain amount of insinuation*) If he hasn't thought it necessary to acquaint you . . I'm afraid that I . . .

[*The DIRECTOR attempts to look at WARRENDER's papers. WARRENDER puts them behind his back.*

DIRECTOR (*stricken*) Oh ! I see (*Again perplexed*) Warrender . ?

WARRENDER Warrender

[*At this moment the CHAIRMAN jacks-in-the-boxes out of his office*

CHAIRMAN Oh, Warrington—you are Warrington, aren't you ?

WARRENDER Practically !

CHAIRMAN Warrington, do put the telephone through to here. Someone on the Board of Trade wants to speak to you.

WARRENDER The Permanent Under-Secretary ?

CHAIRMAN I daresay. He's been stammering away to me on the telephone for the last quarter of an hour. He doesn't seem to have a notion of what's wanted. But he said that Warrington would tell him all about it.

WARRENDER (*to back of desk*) I'll attend to him. (*He telephones, while the others look on with a certain reverence*) Hallo, Permanent Under-Secretary to the Board of Trade speaking ? 'Morning to you, Permanent Under-Secretary . . . Yes, it's here . . . What's all this about the Kubinsky business ? You don't know the first thing about it ? So I should have gathered ! You must have lost all the papers. Then what's the use of going into details with you ? Look here, supposing I pop across to Whitehall to-morrow morning and tell you all about it ? Good ! I will. What did you do with the Pychley on Saturday ? A thirty-minute burst across the best country ? Good, good ! Fine ! Congratulations ! I'll to-morrow, then ! (*He hangs up the*

receiver.) Gosh, isn't it awful having to deal with Government officials? (*Sits on arm of settee.*)

CHAIRMAN : But you've got the trick of it ! Our friend the managing director doesn't seem so happy ! 'Morning, Ponsonby.

DIRECTOR : Good morning, Mr. Chairman.

WARRENDER : I've put in a good deal of work on the matter, Mr. Chairman. Day and night it's kept me going.

CHAIRMAN : Day and night, has it ? But you seem to have found time for other things. Wherever I've been I seem to have seen you. How did you like the Beethoven Fourth Symphony the other night ?

WARRENDER : You mean the Tchaikovsky Fifth . . . ?

CHAIRMAN (*laughing*) : Bless, me, so it was ! I forget everything these days. He's a good chap, isn't he, Ponsonby ? *My* personal staff are all like that ! (*Clipping WARRENDER on the shoulder*) Go on as you're going, my dear man. You'll never be a one-track-mind business-man—your head in the ledgers all the time ! You're taking over this Kubasky affair from us, aren't you ?

WARRENDER : Not Basky—Binsky !

CHAIRMAN : Yes—I *said* Basky ! What do you think of the whole thing, Ponsonby ?

DIRECTOR (*taken aback*) : D'you know, I don't seem to remember very much about it.

CHAIRMAN (*overjoyed*) : D'you mean that ? Thank goodness there's *something* in the bank you don't know about.

DIRECTOR (*correcting himself*) : I meant to say . . . I know the essentials, of course. Naturally I haven't got all the details at the moment.

CHAIRMAN (*heartily*) : Details ? Well . . . we all

know we can go to Warrington for *them*, don't we ?

DIRECTOR : That goes without saying.

CHAIRMAN : Come in here for a second, then. There's something I want to talk to you about.

[*He draws the MANAGING DIRECTOR into his office, looking at his watch.*]

Bless us, I'd no idea it was so late.

[*YVONNE, his daughter. a tall and beautiful maiden, comes into the room.*]

YVONNE : Hullo, Pop !

CHAIRMAN : Oh, there you are.

YVONNE : Wasn't I to fetch you, Pop ? Have you gone and forgotten again ?

CHAIRMAN : I haven't forgotten—but I'll be a second or two. Warrington, keep her amused here a moment, will you ? there's a good chap. (*To the MANAGING DIRECTOR*) Come along ! I know you're equal to anything, from the Kubasinsky matter upwards. . . .

[*They go out R*]

WARRENDER (*familiarly*) : Good morning, Yvonne. How are you ?

YVONNE : Very well, thanks, but— (*She is at a loss.*)

WARRENDER : Don't say you've forgotten . . .

YVONNE : Why, I mean . . .

WARRENDER (*cutting in*) : Randolph Warrender . . . Wimbledon, the Club Tournaments. You had a marvellous service—like a young panther. You were brilliant !

YVONNE : Wimbledon ? (*Doubtfully*) Of course . . . we were with the Robertsons ?

WARRENDER : The Robertsons ? Yes. And after the game you turned up in a light orange linen

summer frock . . . very smart . . . very fetching. . . .

YVONNE : Fancy you remembering *that*.

WARRENDER : Oh ! I couldn't forget that.

YVONNE : Of course, Mr. Warrender

[FITCH enters.

FITCH : The chairman wants me. (*Crosses to chairman's door*)

WARRENDER (*delighted*) : Then I should pop in—and quick !

FITCH (*crosses to desk—he puts a pencil behind one ear and goes to the door. He returns to catch up another pencil to put behind his other ear, and reaches for a small note-book. The bell rings again angrily*) : Get out of my way . . . Randolph. Excuse me. Randolph, please.

[*He hurries into the chairman's office.*

WARRENDER goes back to his seat and begins writing furiously, taking not the least further notice of YVONNE

YVONNE (*after a moment, from the armchair*) . I hope I'm not in your way, Mr. Warrender ?

WARRENDER (*looking up hurriedly*) . In my way ? Oh no, not at all. (*He goes on writing.*)

[*Pause.*

YVONNE (*disappointed*) : You seem to be fairly busy.

WARRENDER (*writing*) : Yes, fairly busy, fairly busy. That's putting it mildly ! (*He dives his head into a lower drawer*)

YVONNE : And you don't mind it ?

WARRENDER . I like it.

YVONNE : What exactly is your job here ?

WARRENDER : I'm on the Kubinsky business . . . working directly with your father

YVONNE : How do you find you get on with Pop ?

WARRENDER (*giving her more attention*) : A dream !
He's everything one's business boss should be—
charming, friendly, and considerate I
think he probably inherits a lot of it from you !

YVONNE (*pleased*) : D'you mean that ?

WARRENDER : Of course I do. If only you knew
how glad I am to have got into his bank

YVONNE : Are you ?

WARRENDER : Oh, I am.

YVONNE : I wouldn't mind having a job either.

WARRENDER : You ? Well, I believe they want
a night-watchman.

YVONNE : That surprises you ? I can do typing
and shorthand and a couple of languages as
well. Only, for all that, I shouldn't work here.

WARRENDER : Why not ?

YVONNE (*sitting on the arm of the sofa*) : Because—
well, keep it under your hat, won't you—I think
the staff here is pretty well run to death. But
you needn't pass it on.

WARRENDER : As though I would !

YVONNE : As a person Pop's an angel ! But as a
banker . . .

WARRENDER : It's not *his* fault. It's mostly the
managing director fellow.

YVONNE (*eagerly*) : D'you think so too ? I believe
it is ! He's always intriguing against Pop—he
probably wants to get his job. But you'll stick
up for us.

WARRENDER : With my life's blood.

YVONNE : Really. D'you think Pop knows that ?

WARRENDER : I think he trusts me . . . absolutely
unlimitedly. From the first second he saw me
. . . before he had the faintest idea who I was . . .
he took me absolutely for granted.

YVONNE (*enthusiastically*) · Isn't that just like old Pop ! He always goes straight on personal intuition.

WARRENDER · And you . . ?

YVONNE · I'm just the same.

WARRENDER · Heredity again !

YVONNE : Like us here to-day, as a matter of fact . . before we've had really more than a couple of words together we've already sworn to give our life's blood for Pop, and death to the managing director

WARRENDER · I think we should go deeper into this matter

YVONNE · You'd like to ?

WARRENDER · Where and when ?

YVONNE · Will you come in at about six o'clock this evening ?

WARRENDER (*wistfully*) : Cocktails and cheese straws ?

YVONNE · Why—don't you like them ?

WARRENDER (*resignedly*) · Like them ? I live on them !

YVONNE · I'll give you fair warning—only very clever people are allowed to come to cocktails with us · Of course, Pop'll be there

WARRENDER : Really ? That's fine !

YVONNE · Are you *so* pleased ? (*Rather hurt*) Look here, which of us do you like best—Pop or me ?

WARRENDER : Naturally, Pop !

YVONNE (*laughing*) · I see you're a very truthful man, Mr. Warrender.

[*The CHAIRMAN comes in with FITCH.*

CHAIRMAN · Nuisance the joint managers not being here. Where's Yvonne ? Oh, Yvonne, there you are.

YVONNE : And now we'd better get a move on. It's late.

CHAIRMAN • Good-bye, Warringer. When can we have a further talk over the Kobinsky affair ?

[*The MANAGING DIRECTOR comes in.*]

YVONNE : This afternoon ! He's coming in to cocktails.

CHAIRMAN • Capital ! You've earned a little off-time this afternoon. You're looking rather done in.

WARRENDER (*who is apparently getting to like a lie for its own sake*) : It isn't surprising. I haven't had a holiday for a year . . .

CHAIRMAN (*jocularly*) • And you won't get any for another year by the look of it ! We're going to need you in this piece of business, my boy. Do you like the feeling of being indispensable ? Ponsonby, you'll speak to the joint managers, will you ? Come on, Yvonne.

[*He goes out.*]

YVONNE (*to WARRENDER*) : A cocktail and a sandwich, then, at six. I'll be to-night !

WARRENDER : Au revoir !

[*She goes out.*]

PONSONBY (*a little thawed in manner*) : I'm very glad, Warrender, that we shall be working together in this matter.

WARRENDER . I'm very pleased too. I'd also be glad if you could put Fitch here at my disposal.

PONSONBY : But certainly (*Sharply*) Mr. Fitch, you'll be so good as to take all your instructions from now onward from Mr. Warrender.

FITCH (*rises—unnerved*) : Me ? From Mr. Warrender ?

PONSONBY (*threatening*) : Have you any objection ?

FITCH, (*brokenly*) : None at all ! Not the least in the world !

PONSONBY : I should say not.

[*The joint managers, HOLLMAN and NICHOLSON, come in—the first a portly and business-like self-made man, the other an amateur and a dilettante.*]

NICHOLSON (*airily to PONSONBY*) : My dear feller, the chairman seems in a great stew about something. He said you wanted to talk over the "Kubinasky business."

PONSONBY : Er—yes. Tell me—when did we last have a board meeting about it?

NICHOLSON : Actually . . . the exact date's escaped me. In this place it's one damned thing after another. (*With some malice*) But I'll bet friend Hollam knows all about it. He's got a memory like a piece of clockwork.

HOLLMAN : What exactly are you talking about?

WARRENDER (*chipping in very quickly*) : The Kubinsky works. With the City Industrial Bank—a joint deal. Backed up by the Board of Trade. The whole thing's been off for the winter. Now it's come up again. A decision is in sight.

NICHOLSON (*stifling a yawn*) : Who's this?

PONSONBY : Surely you know ; Warrender.

WARRENDER : He does—only not probably as the bank's representative in this Kubinsky business. I began years ago in Hollman's department—

HOLLMAN : You began under me?

WARRENDER : I was the young man that sat by the window—years ago before I was sent abroad to the branch office in Berne. I got my first step up in the bank under you. You must remember.

HOLLMAN (*bluntly*) : I don't.

WARRENDER : Well, anyhow, I'm he. I'm very glad we're going to have the pleasure of working together.

HOLLMAN : What is the Kubinsky business ?

PONSONBY : *You* don't know about it ?

HOLLMAN (*flatly*) : No !

PONSONBY : That's impossible ! The Kubinsky affair—good heavens ! It's already gone as far as the Board of Trade.

NICHOLSON (*much delighted*) : Isn't that funny, now ? For I do *seem* to remember having heard the name at least ! Wait a minute—somewhere there's a Kubinsky brickworks, or used to be, or something like that. Walton-on-the-Naze. Tile and Cement Works ? Isn't that it ?

HOLLMAN : I suppose I've heard the name.

NICHOLSON : I wonder if it's anything to do with the Norwich municipal building scheme. The chairman has always been on building operations.

PONSONBY : That *must* be it, of course ! Shall we go over the details in my office ?

HOLLMAN : By all means. After you, Nicholson.

[NICHOLSON and HOLLMAN go into PONSONBY's office.]

PONSONBY : Look here, Warrender, to-morrow you'd better put me wise as to all the legal details of the matter. You'll do that ?

WARRENDER : With pleasure.

PONSONBY (*returning to WARRENDER, confidentially*) : Marvellous, isn't it, how some people seem to remember nothing. In future, you'll be very careful, won't you, to give me all the *inside information* before you pass it on to these people ?

WARRENDER : With great pleasure !

[PONSONBY follows them.]

(*To FITCH, jubilantly*) Now I begin to know what I'm going to do with the Kubinsky affair ! He said, I wonder if it's going to be anything to

do with a building scheme. Well, it's *going* to have something to do with a building scheme !

FITCH : That finishes it ! I'm through with you ! You're now my superior officer here in the bank. Decide ! In five minutes either you or I will get the sack. Which is it to be ?

WARRENDER (*pause—politely*) : After you, always !

[DOROTHY *comes in quickly*.

DOROTHY : Oh, if you don't mind, Mr. Warrender.

WARRENDER : What is it, Dorothy ?

DOROTHY : They tell me the chairman's hopped it. Could I do a little shopping ? Do you think you could possibly give me permission ?

FITCH (*hurt to the heart*) : What ? You'd ask permission from *him* ?

DOROTHY (*disdainfully*) : More than I'd think of doing from you, ducky ! May I, Mr. Warrender ?

WARRENDER (*magnanimously*) : Yes, of course. I'll make it all right.

[DOROTHY *puts out her tongue at FITCH and makes for the door*.

PONSONBY (*appearing at his door*) : Miss Wilson—take a letter, please !

DOROTHY : Very sorry, Mr. Ponsonby, but Mr. Warrender's just told me I could go.

PONSONBY : " Mr. Warrender's just—" Oh, of course, that's different. All right, you can go.

DOROTHY : Thank you so much, Mr. Warrender.

WARRENDER . That's all right, dear. (*She departs.*)

PONSONBY : Warrender, d'you know where you're lunching to-day ?

WARRENDER (*running his hand quickly through his trouser pockets*) : In point of fact—I don't !

PONSONBY : Come along and have some with us. My wife will be delighted to meet you. I've talked a lot about you to her.

WARRENDER : It's awfully kind of you !

PONSONBY : Fitch, get on to Simpsons' and tell them to make my table for three. One o'clock, then.

[*He goes back to his room.*]

WARRENDER : I'll be there.

FITCH : Oh ! (*He collapses despairingly into his seat*)

WARRENDER (*takes his hat, gloves, and umbrella. To FITCH—superbly*) : Mr. Secretary . . . if anybody asks for me, tell them, will you, that I'm lunching with my old friend the managing director ? (*He moves towards door and strides out.*)

[FITCH, in misery, begins to put a telephone call through to Simpsons'.

CURTAIN

ACT II

The bank's board-room. Impressive. A little more than a week later. (For production in a small theatre there is no need to change the set.)

WILLIAM is dusting the large table, and DOROTHY WILSON is arranging an enormous pile of papers and telephoning.

DOROTHY (*at the telephone*): I've already told you this is the London and Metropolitan . . . board-room. No, Mr. Warrender has gone across to the Board of Trade . . . ! He'll be back any minute. . . . Good-bye.

WILLIAM: It's like that every day now, from dewy dawn to dewy dawn. Everyone's after Mr. Warrender.

DOROTHY: It's his masterpiece to-day! First board meeting on the Kubinsky affair.

WILLIAM: Who'd have thought it—that that young man would get on so far. . . . I remember him when he first came to the bank fifteen years ago. . . .

DOROTHY (*quickly*): How long did you say? Fifteen?

WILLIAM: That's right, miss. When he was almost a nipper. . . . I can see him now—he can't have long had his first pair of long trousers on. . . .

[FITCH comes in busily.

Good morning to you, sir.

FITCH: 'Morning! (*To DOROTHY*) What are you doing?

DOROTHY: Just putting out their pencils and papers.

FITCH: What?

DOROTHY: They must have something to draw their little pictures on during the chairman's speech.

FITCH : Please don't be frivolous, Miss Wilson.
(To WILLIAM) And what are *you* doing ?

WILLIAM : Dusting around for the chairman.

DOROTHY : To-day one had better look out how one messes about with the chairman's things . . . the poor old pet is a bit touchy on these occasions.

FITCH : It's no manner to talk about the chairman, and in any case it's not your business, Miss Wilson. Now at this Kubinsky board meeting I suggest the following procedure should be adopted . . .

DOROTHY : It's no more your business either ! It's Mr. Warrender's from beginning to end, and——

FITCH : Mr. Warrender's indeed ! It's Mr. Warrender who's sending my hair grey !

WILLIAM (*soothingly*) : I shouldn't worry, sir. You'll never get grey hair.

FITCH (*interested*) : D'you really mean that, William ? Why ?

WILLIAM : It'll all have fallen out long before !

FITCH : How dare you ! And who asked for your opinion, anyway ?

[DOROTHY *laughs*.

This is no laughing matter, Miss Wilson.

[*He is on the point of leaving the room hurriedly, when he again bumps into the little OLD GENTLEMAN of the First Act.*

OLD GENTLEMAN : I beg your pardon !

FITCH (*furiously*) : What ! You're here again !

OLD GENTLEMAN : Yes, about a job as night-watchman. . . . I thought perhaps the managing director . . .

FITCH : You should apply to him personally.

OLD GENTLEMAN : I have already . . . and he's thrown me out. I thought perhaps . . . the chairman might *not* throw me out.

FITCH : Then you thought quite right for once !
He wouldn't do it ; that would be my job !

OLD GENTLEMAN : But look here—if you were to be obliging——

FITCH : To you ? I know all about you already. You *will* push in without an appointment. . . Now listen to this ; the rules are—first, ask for the commissionaire (*grunt from WILLIAM*) , second, ask for the personal secretary ; then, when *they've* both thrown you out again——

OLD GENTLEMAN (*nearly crying*) : But if you'd only take my name——

FITCH (*with finality*) . William, show this gentleman out immediately.

WILLIAM : All right, sir, all right ! (*Soothingly to the OLD GENTLEMAN*) You come along with me, sir. . . I should chuck it up if I was you.

[*He pats the OLD GENTLEMAN reassuringly on the shoulder, and gently shores him out into the corridor, following him.*]

FITCH (*still ruffled*) : Incredible persistency !

DOROTHY Slotty, why are you so nasty to him ?

FITCH : Because I've really got a good heart, if you want to know ! He wouldn't get the job in any case——

DOROTHY : That's true enough !

FITCH : So why should he go wasting his time here for nothing ? He can be having a look round somewhere else. Sometimes cruelty can be a kindness, Dolly, and——

DOROTHY : “ Dolly ” ? What's that you're saying ? Have you gone batty ?

FITCH : Yes, I have gone batty, as you so vulgarly put it. My philosophy is shattered ! My faith in an ordered life is no more ! One works oneself sick here year after year—painfully—ploddingly—and then all of a sudden . . .

DOROTHY : Your shoe-lace is undone.

[*He kneels.*

(*Chipping in exultantly*) Then a Warrender comes along, and gets through more in a couple of minutes than anyone else in a lifetime ! (*Kneels beside him.*)

FITCH (*much astonished*) : How do you know what he's getting through ?

DOROTHY : Because I'm not the fool you take me for !

FITCH : Take you for a fool ?

DOROTHY : You know you always do, inside you ! But I'll tell you something else. You're just as stand-offish to me as you are to all the others—but you're stand-offish to me . . . because you're jolly well afraid that one day you'll unfreeze !

FITCH : *Me* ? Me unfreeze ? What time have I got for unfreezing ? That's a stupid remark.

DOROTHY (*softly*) : Go on . . . be ruder to me than ever. . . . I see through you . . . Slotty. But . . . don't go and get jealous of Warrender's success. He's yet friend all right. He'll see that you get along with him. You'll get a rise soon. (*Very softly*) A rise—that means more pennies !

FITCH : Why should you get so excited about it ?

DOROTHY (*recklessly, evidently having read her "Man and Superman"*) : Because I'm thinking of our unborn children !

FITCH : Our unborn—*what* . . . ? !

DOROTHY : Yes . . . in the end you'll marry me all right !

FITCH : *I marry you ? Dolly . . . ? What non sense !*

[WARRENDER comes in, exploding with energy as usual.

WARRENDER (*crossing to door as fast as he can go*) : Hullo, Slotty ! Playing trains ? How's yourself, Dolly ? Not too angry with me, I hope.

DOROTHY : Me ? Why should I be ?

WARRENDER : Because this last week I've kept you on the hop. Now—transcribe this as fast as ever you can. It's the technical and legal report of the Kubinsky Works. Three copies. . . . Jump to it.

DOROTHY : Working for you is the perfect slimming cure.

[*She takes the document and goes out.*

WARRENDER : Slotty, place these round, will you ?

FITCH : What are they ?

WARRENDER : They're of no importance. Only the replies to the replies.

FITCH : This is like nothing that's ever happened in the history of the bank ! Within a week you've got up a special board meeting—about nothing at all ! You've made two banks and the Board of Trade look fools ! The disaster's beyond belief ! Roberts from the Board of Trade and Lord Farley'll turn up on time ; and it will then transpire that there's no such thing as any " Kubinsky business," nor ever has been !

WARRENDER (*desperately*) : I've got no choice in the matter ! It's the Devil or the deep sea ! If I give them a second to look about in, the game's lost !

[*The CHAIRMAN appears, as vaguely as is his wont.*
WARRENDER rises.

CHAIRMAN : Good morning, my dear man, good morning.

WARRENDER : Top of the morning to you, sir !

CHAIRMAN : What's that ? Oh, thank you very much. Good morning, Mr. Fitch. (*With his hand on his forehead*) Look here . . . can you tell me where the first draft of the idea of this Kubinsky business is ? . . . I mean, the first scheme that ever got put on paper, setting out the general idea of it ?

FITCH : The first draft ?

CHAIRMAN : Yes, yes . . . the original document ! On the strength of which this great mass of papers has accumulated. (*He ruffles among them on the table.*) Between ourselves, I don't remember ever seeing it. . . .

WARRENDER (*embarrassed, quickly*) : You'll have it in a minute, sir. (*Bullying FITCH*) Turn up the original draft—and quick about it, Mr. Fitch !

FITCH : Original draft ?

WARRENDER : Didn't you hear what I said ?

FITCH (*furious*) : Very good, sir. (*Under his breath*) You're a swindler !

CHAIRMAN : What did you say ?

WARRENDER : I think he has a cold in the head.

FITCH : I was only reminding him of a certain legal aspect of the matter !

[*He goes out, ostensibly to look for the document in question.*]

CHAIRMAN : Warrender . . . I'd like to say this to you entirely between ourselves . . . but I'm in a bit of a funk of this board meeting.

WARRENDER : But why, Mr. Chairman ?

CHAIRMAN : Haven't you rushed the matter ahead a little too fast ?

WARRENDER (*loftily*) : I always do. It's my way of working.

CHAIRMAN (*quickly*) : Quite, quite ; but for my own part, you know, I never like coming to conferences unless I'm pretty well grounded. . . . We're dealing with people who want watching.

WARRENDER : But, Mr. Chairman, the other parties know a lot less about things than we do.

CHAIRMAN : How's that ?

WARRENDER : I mean to say—the other side has put in a great deal less work on the matter than we have.

CHAIRMAN (*relieved*) : D'you really think so ? You know it ? That's very comforting.

WARRENDER : Yes, sir.

CHAIRMAN (*his hand again at his forehead*) : Now look here, Warrender, if you could tell me how much the other parties know . . .

WARRENDER : Certainly, sir. That's quite easy. I can tell you how little the other parties know.

CHAIRMAN : How long, by the by, have you actually been with us, Warrender ?

WARRENDER : How long, sir ?

CHAIRMAN : Yes.

WARRENDER (*reflecting*) : That would be . . . let's see—oh, a long time now. . . .

CHAIRMAN : I thought it was.

[*They both go out.*]

FITCH, with NICHOLSON and HOLLMAN, comes in from another door.

FITCH : Randolph !

WARRENDER : Shut up !

[*He follows the CHAIRMAN.*]

FITCH : In here, gentlemen, in here.

NICHOLSON : At twelve o'clock then—— ?

FITCH : Yes, the Kubinsky board meeting !

NICHOLSON : After a week only—without any work leading up to it ?

HOLLMAN : Warrender's way, you know !

NICHOLSON (*yawning*) : I'm so damned tired again to-day. . . . We might at least sit down. (*He sits on the sofa.*)

HOLLMAN (*grumbling*) : They might allow a man time, all the same, to get himself up in the matter.

NICHOLSON : They do it because they don't give a damn for what we really think. It's all "Warrender" these days.

HOLLMAN : That's the way bank officials are made. . . . To think that a few years ago he was my junior clerk

FITCH (*astomshed*) : A few years ago he was under you ?

HOLLMAN : Of course he was ! He used to sit over by the big window downstairs, and work away like the devil.

FITCH : He did, did he ?

NICHOLSON : Did he really ?

HOLLMAN (*to FITCH*) : You've known him a long time, haven't you ?

FITCH : Where did you get that from, sir ?

HOLLMAN : They say he got you into the bank here.

FITCH : I ? Came in under him ?

NICHOLSON : So they say. He's a good chap, even though he is a bit of a thruster. I remember a few years ago, when we were cutting down staff, he stuck up for every one of those who

were sacked . . . he fought for them like a tiger. . . .

FITCH (*mumbling*) : Tigers ! . . . Jackasses !

NICHOLSON : What's that ?

FITCH (*quickly*) : I was only astonished at your long memory, sir.

NICHOLSON (*complacently*) : It's merely a question of concentration, Fitch. One can train oneself to remember anything one likes. . . .

HOLLMAN . Of course.

FITCH . I see, sir. Thank you. I will remember it.

[FITCH *moves to meet the* MANAGING DIRECTOR, *who comes in at this moment.*

DIRECTOR (*brusquely*) . 'Morning, gentlemen ! 'Morning, Fitch. . . . Get out of here and leave us alone a moment.

FITCH (*humbly*) Certainly, sir.

[FITCH *departs.*

DIRECTOR (*looking round him quickly and mysteriously*) . Now look here—promise me that what I say now remains between ourselves.

NICHOLSON } Why, naturally.

HOLLMAN } Certainly.

DIRECTOR : Good, then. . . . Hollman, do you mind ?

[HOLLMAN *sits on the settle.*

Now listen to this carefully. Hasn't it by any chance occurred to you that—behind our backs—a sort of conspiracy is being got up ?

HOLLMAN }
NICHOLSON } A conspiracy ?

HOLLMAN : Um . . . perhaps that is the right word.

DIRECTOR : In the whole of my experience, a board meeting has never been pushed forward with such a . . . such a *brutal* speed of impatience. . . .

HOLLMAN . That's true enough.

NICHOLSON : Yes, indeed.

DIRECTOR : Well? Isn't all this rush a bit suspicious?

HOLLMAN . Come to think of it—so it is.

DIRECTOR (*quietly*) . Isn't it a little as if—someone was taking particular pains to leave us no time to get at the root of the matter. Isn't someone trying to fire at our heads—a *fait accompli*?

[NICHOLSON and HOLLMAN look at each other.]

HOLLMAN . Warrender, you mean?

NICHOLSON . Warrender . . . ?

DIRECTOR : Thank you, gentlemen ! (*He lights a cigarette*) It's you who have named the name ! Oh, Warrender's a good friend of mine. . . . He lunched with me only a day or two ago. . . . I know that he's very well in with the chairman and the chairman's family . . . so much so that some of the senior officials of the bank are not too pleased about it. . . . But this time, I'm sorry to say, I must take a hand against him myself. Can I rely on your standing by me?

HOLLMAN . Could you perhaps be a little more explicit?

DIRECTOR (*leaning over table—still quietly*) : This board meeting must *not* take place to-day. After all, it's a matter of prestige with us. . . . This Kubinsky business can't be allowed to become the monopoly of Warrender . . . ! All the less so, in fact, because, if you'll remember rightly, the original big idea of the thing was *my* conception. Am I right?

[NICHOLSON and HOLLMAN look at each other.

HOLLMAN : Maybe it was.

NICHOLSON : I suppose so.

HOLLMAN : But I believe that *I* did some of the early work on it. In fact, I know I did. The bank might allow me a little credit.

DIRECTOR (*sharply*) : Well, in any case—what about this ? I've been through all the subsequent papers—but there's never anything *concrete* in them ! What we all want is the original draft idea—the basis of the whole matter. Do either of you happen to have seen it ?

HOLLMAN : I haven't.

NICHOLSON : No.

DIRECTOR : No more have I. . . . And why ? Because Warrender's keeping it from us !

[NICHOLSON and HOLLMAN rise.

He wants to make us dependent on him ! But so long as we are not in full possession of the points of this draft we must not get round any conference table !

HOLLMAN : Right. . . . Good ! That's what I always thought.

NICHOLSON : Yes, I'm with you. I'm with you all the way.

DIRECTOR : Right. Then we all stand together.

[*The CHAIRMAN and WARRENDER come in from the chairman's office.*

Now I maintain . . .

CHAIRMAN (*laughing at their intensity*) : What's up, gentlemen ? Is anything the matter ? Is anything wrong ?

DIRECTOR : Mr. Chairman ! Much as it goes against the grain with me to oppose my old

friend Warrender . . . I must make it perfectly clear that, in my own opinion, there must be no board meeting to-day !

WARRENDER : I don't quite understand ?

DIRECTOR : I beg to inform you, sir, that you have carried the matter forward a great deal too quickly for our liking. We must have time to acquaint ourselves with affairs.

CHAIRMAN : But *I* don't understand now. D'you mean to say you don't know anything about it ?

PONSONBY (*quickly*) : I never said anything of the kind. We know it very well indeed ! We've all done enough work on it, heaven knows. . . .

HOLLMAN }
NICHOLSON } I should think so.

PONSONBY : . . . before it was all turned over to Warrender's hands.

HOLLMAN : I myself worked out most of the figures. . . .

CHAIRMAN : Did you really ?

NICHOLSON : I did most of the Governmental side of it. . . .

CHAIRMAN : Oh, did you ?

WARRENDER (*breaks in*) : Well, gentlemen . . .

PONSONBY : But naturally we don't know all the details *by heart* ! And I discuss nothing at a board meeting unless I'm master of the whole outfit !

NICHOLSON }
HOLLMAN } I feel entirely the same.

WARRENDER (*nervous*) : Quite right. Then, gentlemen . . . will you tell me what I can do for you ?

PONSONBY : We want to *see* the *original draft* scheme !

CHAIRMAN : He's right about that. I'd like to look at the draft scheme too.

WARRENDER (*embarrassed*) : But of course, gentlemen ! Of course, sir ! (*He shouts at the door*) Mr. Fitch, here a minute, please. Of course you do, gentlemen.

[*Enter FITCH.*]

FITCH : You want me ?

WARRENDER (*sharply*) : Haven't you got the first draft of the Kubinsky scheme yet ?

FITCH : I'm very sorry—not yet !

WARRENDER : Not yet ? Why ?

FITCH : Why ? Because it's nowhere to be found !

PONSONBY : Mr. Fitch, how comes it that an important document like that can disappear half an hour before a board meeting ?

WARRENDER (*echoing*) : Mr. Fitch, how comes it that an important document like that can disappear half an hour before a board meeting ?

PONSONBY : All the papers of the chairman's office pass through your hands, and, if the draft's lost, it must be you who——

FITCH (*desperately*) : Must be *me* ? !

PONSONBY : Yes, *you* ! I've been watching you for a long time now. You're the slackest clerk in the bank ! You've got absolutely no sense of order !

FITCH : *Me* ! No sense of order ? I don't think I heard aright. . . .

PONSONBY (*brutally*) : Then you're paid to listen to what's said to you ! Look out for yourself ! When we're next cutting down staff, be sure *you* won't be forgotten !

CHAIRMAN (*interposing*) : Gentlemen, gentlemen ! Surely we can settle this in a friendly way ? What do you say, Warrender ?

WARRENDER : Mr. Chairman ! Fitch !

CHAIRMAN : If you two gentlemen will come into my room and have a glass of sherry . . .

NICHOLSON : That's very charming of you ; but it's entirely against my principles in the morning——

[*Going with the* CHAIRMAN.

HOLLMAN : Certainly. I will. A very good idea.

[*Following him.*

CHAIRMAN : Ponsonby, you'll join us ?

PONSONBY : If it's all right with you, Mr. Chairman.

CHAIRMAN : That gives you a quarter of an hour, Warrender, to find the missing document.

WARRENDER : I'll do my best, sir.

CHAIRMAN (*severely*) : I'm afraid I see their point very clearly. A quarter of an hour's grace, then.

[*He goes out.*

WARRENDER : A quarter of an hour's grace ! Great Scott ! What are we to do about it, Slotty ?

FITCH : I've seen plenty of people thrown out on their ear before now. . . . But there'll never have been such a throwing out as this one's going to be !

WARRENDER : And you're sniggering about it !

FITCH : I wasn't sniggering. . . . It was what they call "sardonic laughter." I scent my downfall.

WARRENDER : *You scent yours ?*

FITCH (*lyric*) : "Our souls shall fly together . . . !"
In other words, we'll get the same sack at the same time. That's the single positive achievement of your barging in here ! You've put no bread into your own mouth ! And you've wrenched mine away from me !

WARRENDER : That's a lie !

FITCH : It is not a lie. You see this board meeting table . . .

WARRENDER : Ycs, I do.

FITCH : Well—on this very table Ponsonby's going to skin you alive.

WARRENDER (*jumping away from it as though it were red-hot*) : But . . . how can he . . . ? A couple of days ago he was inviting me to lunch !

FITCH : He hated you from the first minute he saw you—because you got on well with the chairman, and he never can ! It'll give him the greatest kick he's ever had in life to discover that the chairman's little pet is a common swindler !

WARRENDER (*desperately*) : I'm *not* a swindler ! I only wanted to create work ! Not for myself alone ! For thousands of other people as well—and I'd have done it if only the Kubinsky business had gone through. . . .

FITCH : A dream, that's dashed and dished ! Buck up ! Grab your coat and skedaddle !

WARRENDER : But what about you, Slotty ?

FITCH (*sighing*) : Hang about at the corner. I'll be along a second later. . . .

WARRENDER (*he moves to his coat : then stops : then returns. With determination*) : I'm damned if I will ! I won't hook it until I've made things square for you at least. . . . Hell's bells ! I swear still, here and now, that what I wanted to do—if only I could have done it—would have been a good piece of business for everybody. (*There is a knock.*)

FITCH : Hi, that's your Yvonne.

[YVONNE comes in.

YVONNE : Good morning, Mr. Warrender !

WARRENDER : Good morning, Yvonne !

YVONNE : Good morning, Mr. Fitch.

[FITCH *bows silently.*

Buzzer, twice.

FITCH : That'll be the chairman. Will you excuse me ?

[*He goes out.*

WARRENDER : Yvonne, my dear.

YVONNE : I was a bit nervous about coming here . . . I know you've got a big day on !

WARRENDER : If you knew quite *how* "big" a day . . . (*He looks at his wrist-watch*) Ten minutes more !

YVONNE : I know ! That's why I'm here. I don't care a scrap about the bank work otherwise. . . . But to-day's board meeting is something special.

WARRENDER : Yes.

YVONNE : I thought you'd like to feel that a friend of yours—wished you luck.

WARRENDER : An old friend ?

YVONNE (*sitting down*) : Well—fairly old ! We've known each other a whole week. . . .

WARRENDER : Yes—a week ! So it is ! It's just a week ago that you asked me to come round to cocktails for the first time. . . .

YVONNE : And now you seem to come every day . . . although you almost fall dead asleep with sheer tiredness !

WARRENDER : Don't you get fed up with me ? (*He sits next to her.*)

YVONNE : Fed up ? Why should I ? After all, you're so "decently" tired ! And there's something rather nice about our friendship, isn't there ? We talk about such lovely, practical things . . . about drains and cement . . . about

reinforced concrete. We've gone building together. . . . Houses have sprung up round the cocktail glasses. You've gone on about it so enthusiastically that I'd almost have carted a hod of bricks for you myself !

WARRENDER : Yvonne !

YVONNE : Yes—with my own hands . . . up and down ladders and everything !

WARRENDER : Yvonne. I'm . . . I'm terrified !

YVONNE : What of ?

WARRENDER : Of you !

YVONNE : Why on earth ?

WARRENDER : Because . . . you've got me all wrong.

YVONNE : You'd better explain, hadn't you ?

WARRENDER : If I did . . . it's on the cards that I'd lose everything. But you *must* know—you *must* know the truth . . . !

YVONNE : Yes—I'd better. . . .

WARRENDER (*suddenly gravelled*) : How can I start on it ? I . . . I don't exist at all !

YVONNE : What do you mean ?

WARRENDER : This "Mr. Warrender" that they're all talking about . . . there isn't any such person. I'm here in the bank only as a mirage ! An optical illusion ! A wraith of the morning mist !

YVONNE : Are you cracked ? (*She shakes him by the shoulder.*)

WARRENDER (*shouting out and jumping away from her*) : For God's sake don't touch me ! If you do, I'll burst like a soap-bubble ! I'll vanish in thin air—me, and the whole Kubinsky business along with me ! Don't you *see* ? It's all a

swindle ! It's a lie, the whole lot of it ! There is no Kubinsky business ! And I, the chief originator and only representative in the transaction . . . I'm not even on the bank-books as an employee !

YVONNE : What *are* you, then ?

WARRENDER (*coming down to earth again*) : I'm a man—who popped in from the pavement outside . . . to get some work going ! Because I couldn't stand inaction any longer !

YVONNE : A swindler ?

WARRENDER : Yes—a swindler ! If swindling's the only way to make work these days !

YVONNE : Really, you know— (*She moves away from him.*) This is disgraceful ! What on earth were you thinking about ? Why didn't you tell me in the beginning ? What d'you take me for ?

WARRENDER (*surprised*) : What d'you mean ?

YVONNE : Do you mean that you rushed in here and made work for yourself ? But I think that's frightfully sporting. It's heroic.

WARRENDER (*with a gasp*) : My dear !

YVONNE : You've brought a breath of fresh air into the bank ! Now we can *really* begin to be friends, from the beginning ! (*She shakes his hand enthusiastically.*)

WARRENDER : Good Lord. . . . Yvonne. . . .

[FITCH *rushes in from the chairman's office.*

FITCH (*quickly*) : Randolph ! Randolph ! . . . Oh, I beg your pardon !

WARRENDER : It's all right. You can say what you like. Old Slotty is my accomplice. . . .

YVONNE : Old Slotty ! What, Mr. Fitch ? At last I've heard something human about you ! My congratulations !

FITCH (*staggered*) : What's this ?

WARRENDER (*urgently*) : Get on with it, get on, get on ! What's up with *you* ?

FITCH : Randolph ! Something's happened. . . . The first draft . . . the draft . . . !

WARRENDER : Don't tell me a stork has brought one ?

FITCH : On the contrary ! Ponsonby's come to the conclusion that it probably doesn't exist !

YVONNE : What's that ?

WARRENDER : The original draft of the Kubinsky affair—they want to see it, and it doesn't exist. For lack of a miserable bit of paper we're sunk.

YVONNE : Well . . . we'll produce it—whether it exists or not.

[*The CHAIRMAN hurries in.*]

CHAIRMAN (*sadly*) : Warrender, at least I can congratulate you on one thing !

WARRENDER : And what's *that*, sir ?

CHAIRMAN : At least you've had the privilege of standing the entire bank on its head ! Ponsonby's been giving me a terrible time. Nobody's found the original document. You haven't found it ?

WARRENDER : No, no, not yet.

CHAIRMAN : Mr. Fitch, go and tell everyone as quick as you can, that there'll be no board meeting to-day.

YVONNE : Just a second, please.

CHAIRMAN : What's that ?

YVONNE : I said wait a minute, Mr. Fitch !

CHAIRMAN : Now, look here, Yvonne, are you chairman of this bank, or am I ? Just let me know, that's all.

[YVONNE *whispers to her father.*

I can't hear a word you're saying. Whisper louder.

[*She whispers again.*

Oh, you really think so? Yes, yes, perhaps you're right. Mr. Fitch, go and say to them . . . what was it?

YVONNE : That there *will* be a board meeting just the same.

CHAIRMAN : Yes, yes. There will be a board meeting just the same.

YVONNE : Those are his orders, Mr. Fitch !

CHAIRMAN : Yes, those are his orders, Mr. Fitch.

[FITCH *goes out.*

(*To his daughter*) All the same, an important document like that must be found. I can't stand Ponsonby as a general rule—but he's right this time. And whoever's lost it will have to have the sack.

YVONNE : Then you'd better send in your resignation now, Pop.

CHAIRMAN : *Me*—resign?

YVONNE : Of course—it's *you* that lost it !

CHAIRMAN : *I* lost it?

YVONNE : Yes, you. Who else? Didn't I give it into your own hands a week ago?

CHAIRMAN : You gave it to me?

YVONNE : Mr. Warrender especially told me to tell you to look after it. He knew how vague you were. . . .

CHAIRMAN : Then why on earth didn't you say so, Warrender? Why have you let the whole place be turned upside down?

YVONNE (*quickly*) : Because of Ponsonby.

CHAIRMAN : Ah. . . . Because of Ponsonby ?

YVONNE : Of course it was ! Ponsonby knows well enough that the origin of the Kubinsky business is *your* idea ! And he uses every chance to smash it up, because of it. . . .

CHAIRMAN : Yes, he does, doesn't he ?

YVONNE (*softly*) : And poor Mr. Warrender has sacrificed himself for your sake

CHAIRMAN : I'm awfully ashamed of myself, Warrender. . . . Do forgive me !

WARRENDER (*nobly*) : The merest trifle, Mr. Chairman. . . .

CHAIRMAN : But this time Ponsonby's overreached himself—eh ? 'The wretched first draft isn't so very important after all, is it ? No ! (*He looks round for confirmation.*)

WARRENDER : Of course it isn't ! In five minutes we can piece it all together again !

CHAIRMAN : In five minutes. . . . Yes, but who's going to do it ?

WARRENDER : I think I probably could, Mr. Chairman.

CHAIRMAN : No, could you ?

WARRENDER : Do you remember something about it ?

CHAIRMAN : Hark at that now ! Do I remember *anything* about the Kubinsky business . . . do I remember anything about my own idea ! Kubinsky—a closed-down what-d'you-call-it, a tile factory . . . that we could finance in conjunction with the City Industrial Bank ! Why is that ? . . . Oh, yes, for some municipal affair or other . . . building or something like that . . . you know, the tiles and things would be

on the spot and avoid transport. . . . So there you are !

[*This unheard-of effort of memory almost collapses him.*]

YVONNE : The idea did you credit, Pop !

WARRENDER : The conception of a financial genius !

CHAIRMAN (*flattered*) · Oh, thank you very much.

[*PONSONBY comes in, breathing fury*]

PONSONBY : Well, as I suspected, not a trace of the draft scheme ! Very well, no board meeting for us, then !

CHAIRMAN (*to PONSONBY*) There'll be a board meeting just the same, Ponsonby.

PONSONBY : I protest !

CHAIRMAN : Protest as much as you like, you Academician !

PONSONBY : *What* did you call me ?

CHAIRMAN : I said you're the biggest chump I ever met in my life.

PONSONBY : Oh, I'm a chump, am I ? Do you mean that in a friendly way ? You couldn't mean it seriously !

CHAIRMAN (*smacking him on the shoulder*) · You old demon ! Will you do something for me ? Don't trouble your head about that rotten first draft, will you ?

PONSONBY (*puzzled*) : If it's all right with you, Mr. Chairman . . .

CHAIRMAN : We'll work the whole thing out again quite simply ! Can you remember anything about it ?

PONSONBY : I *ought* to be able to ! Seeing that it was *my* idea originally !

CHAIRMAN : *What ! Your idea ?*

PONSONBY : D'you mean you doubt it ?

CHAIRMAN . *I don't doubt anything . . . I'm not a vain man. . . You can have the credit if you want it. But posterity will probably have something to say. What do you say, Warrender ?*

WARRENDER (*hastily*) : Hadn't we better begin reconstructing the draft plan ? A few headings ought to be enough.

CHAIRMAN . You're quite right, Warrender. Five minutes— and we'll have it worked out. Come along.

PONSONBY (*at the door*) After you, old man.

CHAIRMAN (*again slapping him on the shoulder*) After you, old boy.

PONSONBY . Just as you like ! After all, we two can get through a little thing like that in half a minute, eh, Charlie ?

[PONSONBY goes into the chairman's office.]

CHAIRMAN : He's very keen on me all of a sudden ! Well, well ! " Charlie " !

[He follows PONSONBY.]

WARRENDER : Yvonne . . . Yvonne, you angel . . . you're a better liar than I am. How can I ever thank you ?

YVONNE . Rot ! There's no time for sentimentalities now ! The " affair Kubinsky " is being born—actually born at this very moment.

WARRENDER (*with a grin*) . Yes . . . father, the Chairman . . . mother, old Ponsonby . . . but the child will have a strange resemblance to me !

[FITCH comes in.]

FITCH : Roberts from the Board of Trade and Lord Farley have just phoned through that they are here.

WARRENDER : Yes, yes, we're all set. Bring 'em along. All set.

FITCH (*at the door*) Come in, gentlemen, please
This way, Lord Farley

[ROBERTS and LORD FARLEY come in FITCH
busies himself preparing the conference-table.

FARLEY Good morning gentlemen ! Yvonne
dear ! You haven't taken over your papa's job,
have you ?

YVONNE No such luck ! He's still clinging on to
it with tooth and nail

FARLEY Stephen sends you his love

YVONNE (*making them sit down*) Thanks The
same to him.

FARLEY When did you last see Stephen ?

YVONNE D'you know I can't remember

FARLEY An important date like that !
When you're supposed to be getting married
soon ! (*He shakes his head*) By the by, I thought
you were usually riding in the Rover about this
time in the morning Given it up in favour of
the bank business, eh ?

YVONNE I've come to the conclusion that bank
business is about ten times as exciting

WARRENDER Won't you have a cigarette, Lord
Farley ? Congratulations, Roberts !

ROBERTS On what ?

WARRENDER I heard that when you were
shooting in Scotland last week you bagged a
couple of stags—and an M P Is that right ?

ROBERTS More or less ! The stags weren't much
to write home about—but the M P was a magni-
ficent specimen

WARRENDER Splendid !

ROBERTS I only winged him though !

WARRENDER Pity ! You might have had him
set up

[Enter FITCH

Well, now you've got to exercise your marksmanship on this Kubinsky business—not quite so ruthlessly, I hope !

ROBERTS By the way you know, I suppose, the whole Board of Trade's upside down looking for the original draft of the matter ?

FARLEY And so are the entire staff of my bank ! But nothing doing ! Not the trace of a trace !

WARRENDER You needn't worry, sir The whole thing'll be here on that table in a few seconds

[HOLLMAN and NICHOLSON come in

NICHOLSON Good morning, Lord Farley
Good morning, gentlemen 'Morning .
'morning !

ROBERTS 'Morning to you !

HOLLMAN 'Morning, Lord Farley 'Morning
Yvonne Then we're going to hold the board meeting after all !

FARLEY Why not ? Is there anything against it

[The CHAIRMAN and PONSONBY come in

CHAIRMAN Gentlemen ! We all seem to be here ! We may as well begin whenever you like Ah, Alfred, very nice to see you So glad you were able to come, Roberts Will you sit here, gentlemen ? Alfred Mr Ponsonby
Mr Roberts Warrender, you'll sit here, of course.

[He arranges them.

OFFICE BOY brings in extra chairs and places them at the table

Now, gentlemen . . .

YVONNE Pop, do you mind if I stay ?

CHAIRMAN : What's that ? Well . . . what do you say, Alfred ?

FARLEY : Why shouldn't she ?

FITCH : It's most irregular.

PONSONBY : Quiet, Fitch !

FARLEY : I adore a girl who can work, and who can look charming while she's doing it

CHAIRMAN : That may be all very well in your lank, Alfred, but we don't encourage gate-crashers here. No, no. Certainly not.

[YVONNE moves to door.

WARRENDER : Oh, no, I'm afraid we shall have to turn you out.

YVONNE : I'll have my ear to the keyhole all the time. Good luck.

[Exit YVONNE.

WARRENDER looks through keyhole.

CHAIRMAN : Now, Warrender . . . where are you ? Oh ! there you are

[WARRENDER sits.

MISS WILSON enters.

FITCH : You're late, Miss Wilson.

DOROTHY : I am, aren't I ? (*She takes her seat ready to report.*)

CHAIRMAN : And now, gentlemen . . . (*looks at OFFICE BOY.*)

[ALL look at OFFICE BOY—*pause.*

OFFICE BOY : I beg your pardon.

[*He departs hurriedly.*

CHAIRMAN : Well, gentlemen . . .

PONSONBY (*rising*) . Mr. Chairman ! There you are, gentlemen. There's your original draft scheme.

[*He passes over a "draft-scheme," written on a piece of paper about as big as a bus-ticket.*

CHAIRMAN Now, gentlemen . . . as a preliminary, I'd like to welcome here the Government representative, Mr Franklin Roberts of the Board of Trade, who shows, by his presence here, that the Government is actively concerned in getting private enterprise on its feet again

ALL Hear, hear ! Hear, hear !

CHAIRMAN I also greet my distinguished colleague, Lord Farley, chairman of the City Industrial Bank, who embodies in himself that solidarity that the country so greatly needs

ALL Hear, hear ! Hear, hear !

CHAIRMAN Lastly, I would like to express my thanks to those of my staff who have assembled the immense mass of material that laid the ground for this board meeting . . . And I now call upon our friend Warrender to address us on his full report of the whole matter

FARLEY Go on, Warrender !

ALL Hear, hear ! Hear, hear !

WARRENDER (*rising*) Gentlemen ! You may have been slightly astonished to observe how great a conception as our present business can be put down on so small a piece of paper—(*he waves the visiting-card*) or “scrap of paper,” shall I say ?

[*Laughter.*]

The truth is, of course, that the greatest ideas are always the simplest, and can be expressed in short and simple form

NICHOLSON The shorter the better !

WARRENDER Quite so Why should I recapitulate details ? Your intensive work on them for the last six months has given you minute acquaintance with them

FITCH (*overawed*) : Good Lord !

PONSONBY : Quiet, Fitch !

WARRENDER : The core of the matter is this , first point—the Kubinsky factory has been closed down for the last two years

NICHOLSON : Quite !

WARRENDER : Second point—there's going to be a huge scheme of municipal building in the immediate neighbourhood of the factory.

PONSONBY : Exactly.

WARRENDER : Point three—the City Industrial Bank and ourselves propose to finance the factory and bring it to life again, so that the municipality can get its entire building materials on the spot and avoid all transport expenses.

FARLEY (*in a general pause*) . That was my idea !

WARRENDER : The idea speaks for itself, so I'll close my discourse.

[*He sits down.*]

HOLLMAN : That's no good at all.

ROBERTS : Seems to me to be only an idea.

[*Pause.*]

CHAIRMAN : Haven't you run it through a bit quickly, my dear man ?

WARRENDER : All details are, as we know, in the hands of competent specialists. There's no need, therefore, to deal with small technicalities . . . I might enlarge a little, perhaps, on the great significance of the new *principle* that we are working on . . .

FARLEY : Give tongue, Warrender.

ALL : Go on ! Go on ! We'd like to hear it !

WARRENDER (*rising again—taking a swig from a tumbler of water—and generally preparing himself for*

a prolonged effort) . Gentlemen—may I call you my dear colleagues?—it has been our good fortune to *break down* one principle as a beginning—the principle of *waiting uselessly upon events* ! We have smashed through the false belief that no one should, *or dare*, these days, launch out on any new undertaking . . . ! We are working, building, and raising something aloft by our toil ! It is in this that I foresee the overwhelming significance of our Kubinsky transaction. . . .

ROBERTS . But, forgive me .

WARRENDER (*checking him*) . Life itself, sir, is always in process of renewing and transfiguring itself ! The sun (*he raises his hand aloft*), that colossal Trust—if I may so call it—on which the life of the whole earth depends—breaks through the ice on the world's crust every springtime with new fire ! The seed of the soil pushes forth its tiny shoot into a blade of corn, an ear of wheat . . . Trees burst into leaf, and flowers into blossom ! Shall man alone set himself up against this eternal instinct of the universe ?

NICHOLSON : No, of course not

WARRENDER No, of course not What would we say if the spring were to say, "I'm doing nothing this year—I'm waiting for 'better times' " ?

[*Laughter.* WARRENDER is now in the full tide of his eloquence

No, no, gentlemen . . . to get to work is to carry out the will of the world . . . and, if there's nothing else to hand, then one must seize hold of the first bit of furniture one sees and heave it back into the pantechmicon . . . Heave-ho ! ! !

ROBERTS (*staggered—rises*) I beg your pardon ?

WARRENDER (*still in full flow*) . Yes, my dear Roberts, what I said was, "Heave-ho !"

[ROBERTS *sits down quickly*.

In that short and possibly vulgar word may lie our salvation ! The very clever and the very intelligent people seem to have made rather a mess of things ! Now we have to fall back on simple folk like ourselves, who don't talk much, but who *get things done* ! My friends—there in the world outside (*a gesture*) is a factory with its wheels and its engines at rest ! Crank them up again ! A great business lies mouldering with disuse ! Set it going ! Thousands of workmen are hungry ! Give them bread ! Let's do something to create for ourselves our own little world of energy and achievement . If only the will is there, gentlemen all, a new syndicate is in being already, and its name is KUBINSKY !

[*All rise from the conference-table, surround WARRENDER, congratulate him, and shake his hand*
Cries of "Heave-ho" are heard

ROBERTS (*enthusiastically*) . Heave-ho It's done, then !

FARLEY : We'll do it

CHAIRMAN . We'll work it somehow !

PONSONBY (*carried away*) We'll go right through with it

DOROTHY What a lovely man !

CHAIRMAN . Magnificent, my dear man ! A really great effort ! Gentlemen, we'll go and sign the report at once. Heave-ho !

HOLLMAN (*with enthusiasm*) The boy I trained ! My own pupil !

NICHOLSON : I was at Westminster too.

FARLEY : Congratulations, Warrender I don't know what it means but—(*ponderously*)—heave . ho !

[*The CHAIRMAN shepherds them gently into his inner office.*

WARRENDER *gradually disengages himself.*

YVONNE *rushes in.*

YVONNE (*going towards him*) : I simply don't know what to say . . . how pleased I am. . . .

WARRENDER : You've been a darling. . . .

YVONNE : Hark at them in there ! How excited they all are ! Pop ! Pop !

[*She goes into the inner office.*

FITCH : She's right ! I'd like to congratulate you, too ! You've made a marvellous job of it ! You've brought the whole thing to life. . . . Now the millions will begin to flow !

WARRENDER (*suddenly, rather tragically*) : The millions, did you say ? Yes, I've set millions in motion, haven't I ? Millions ! Gosh !

FITCH : What's the matter ?

WARRENDER (*unsteadily*) : Oh, Slotty. . . . Could you lend me a couple of bob ? You see—I'm so hellish hungry. . . .

THE CURTAIN FALLS

ACT III

The outer office again. A couple of weeks later.

WARRENDER *is sitting at the enormous conference-table. The whole table is piled high with papers.*

WARRENDER *is telephoning into two telephones.*

WARRENDER *(into one)* . . . and the issue of stock will follow through a joint selling syndicate. *(Into the other)* *Hullo !* Is that the technical department ? Give me the chief engineer, please —yes, Betterton. *(Into the first)* 'The Government shares will be taken over by . . . *(Into the second)* *Hullo, Warrender here. That the chief engineer?* . . . *(Into the first)* Will be taken over by both banks in co-operation. *(In the second)* *Hullo !* All going well, Betterton ? Will you soon be ready ? *(Into the first)* The administration of the Government shares . . . *(Into the second)* What ? To-morrow morning at eight ? All right ! I'll be there ! *(Into the first)* . . . will be regulated by a limited liability company formed for the purpose . . .

[A third telephone rings. He answers it.

Yes, the City and Metropolitan. . . . Warrender speaking. . . . *Who's that ?* . . . Editor of the *Evening Echo* ? What's the matter ? . . . That settles the shares then. . . . What's that, Mr. Editor ? What are you to write ? . . . May I suggest that you write what your conscience dictates ? . . . No, not you. . . . We want the truth. . . . Well, why not create a precedent ? . . . Yes, we know we will be safe in your hands. Yes, yes. Good-bye. Good day. O.K. *(Hanging up the three phones)* Dorothy, I want you to make me a copy of this schedule, please.

[He goes out.

Enter FITCH with a bundle of papers, followed by PONSONBY.

PONSONBY (*as he enters*) : Fitch. Fitch. Didn't you hear me call you?

FITCH : Yes, Mr. Ponsonby.

PONSONBY : Then why don't you stop? What have you got behind your back?

FITCH : Nothing.

PONSONBY : In your other hand.

FITCH : Oh, these, sir. Some confidential documents for Mr. Warrender's signature.

PONSONBY : Give them to me, please.

FITCH : I'm sorry, sir, but the chairman said . . .

PONSONBY : Mr. Fitch, are you aware that I am the managing director of this bank? Give me those papers at once. (*He snatches them from him.*) Thank you.

[WARRENDER *re-enters*.

FITCH : Oh, Mr. Warrender, Mr. Ponsonby . . .

PONSONBY : Quiet, Fitch! Oh, good morning, Warrender. These are for you to sign. I thought I'd just bring them along.

WARRENDER : That's very kind of you. Now what have we got here? (*Snatching them from him and sitting at desk*) Land drainage . . . cellar space . . . ground plan of the new annexe . . . thank goodness we've got as far as we have.

PONSONBY : And how far is that?

WARRENDER (*non-committally*) : Oh, quite a long way.

PONSONBY : Splendid, splendid. No one more delighted than I am, my dear man. You know that.

[*He goes out bitterly.*

WARRENDER : Come along, Dorothy.

[DOROTHY *comes in*.

Well, what have you got for me? Cement contracts. The reinforced concrete plant. It's marvellous, the whole thing has gone at a gallop, and at eight o'clock, first thing to-morrow morning, the syiens at the Kubinsky works are going to sound for the first shift. After a two years' silence. Isn't it wonderful? Oh, but, Dorothy, we usually spell cement with one M.

DOROTHY. I do everything for you twice over out of sheer enthusiasm! I think you're a wonderful business man. Your speech at the board meeting about "spring is here" very novel!

FITCH (*putting papers in front of him*). These require your signature, Randolph.

WARRENDER (*lounging back in his chair*). All undertakings have three stages. First comes the banker with his cheque-book and his pen, then comes the engineer with his blue prints and his ruler, and last of all comes the workman with his brawn and his hammer. We're on the brawn and hammer stage now.

FITCH (*smartly*). I let's stick to the pen stage for the moment. These still require your signature, Randolph.

[WARRENDER signs them all very quickly, without reading one of them.]

(*Overawed*). My word! You are at the top of the ladder by now, aren't you? You sign without looking at a word of what you're signing just like the chairman.

WARRENDER. I do it for luck. I don't forget that if the chairman had read everything that he put his name to there'd be no Kubinsky works in action to-morrow morning! There you are, Slotty! Take 'em (*Urgently*). Now you've got to do something else for me—very important. You've got to find me old Kubinsky himself.

FITCH But, Randolph, all our attempts to produce him have been fruitless——

WARRENDER Never mind ! Search for him , wire, telephone, and cable ! Dig him up somehow ! He *must* be here an hour from now Now jump to it

FITCH Yes, sir But—but——

WARRENDER The board meeting can't go forward without him

DOROTHY (*chipping in, humbly*) Mr Warrender

WARRENDER Wait a minute, Slotty Dorothy when I'm giving orders

DOROTHY Don't be angry with me if I say something but *must* you work my Slotty absolutely to death all the time ?

WARRENDER *surprised*) What's all this ?

DOROTHY You chase him round so it isn't doing his health any good He's losing weight

FITCH I forbid you, Dolly ! Since when have you interfered with my affairs ?

DOROTHY *Our affairs* Slotty ! I in the dutiful wife already ! I begin looking after my future husband— even before the wedding

FITCH “Future husband” indeed ! Don't be funny ! Why are you so sure that we're going to be married ?

DOROTHY Of course we are ! Didn't you let me give you a kiss last night ? We'll get married all right—either to-day or to-morrow— or next week

FITCH One can't get married to-day or to-morrow or even next week It takes three weeks at least for banns

DOROTHY There's special licences.

FITCH And do you think I'd pay fifty pounds extra for the doubtful privilege of marrying you

—when I don't even know yet what my intentions are ?

DOROTHY : Your intentions got a bit purple last night.

FITCH (*quickly*) : Such intimacies are not for publication.

DOROTHY : Anyway, Mr Warrender, it was enough to make me ring up the register office this morning

FITCH : How dare you ? In any case, I should never allow you to marry me before a registrar.

WARRENDER : Why not ?

FITCH : Because, to me, such institutions suggest a lack of permanency.

DOROTHY (*leaning friendly on WARRENDER'S shoulder*) : Mr Warrender, what do you think we ought to pay for an engagement ring ?

WARRENDER : Oh, well ; some men pay *very* heavily. . . .

FITCH : I protest !

DOROTHY : Protest as much as you like . . . you'll be nabbed all the same ! Cheer up, Slotty.

[*She kicks the door open and goes out*]

WARRENDER : Congratulations, Slotty !

FITCH (*doubtfully*) : I suppose it *will* be true. Everybody seems to do just what they like with me. It *will* be true.

WARRENDER : Poor Slotty ! You don't really like her, then ?

FITCH : I ? Like her ? I think she's lovely ! But she's as untidy as a tinker.

[*PONSONBY comes in.*]

PONSONBY : Oh, Fitch ! Where are Nicholson and Hollman ?

FITCH : I'll tell them at once !

PONSONBY : Yes, at once, at once ! You ought to have warned them yesterday. You're the slackest clerk in the bank—your ideas are as . . . as untidy as a tinker's.

FITCH : Oh ! !

PONSONBY : Jump to it !

[FITCH runs out.

(To WARRENDER) I can't think how you can stick that man—and defend him.

WARRENDER : He did me a very particular service once.

PONSONBY : *He*—did *you* ? Fancy that, now ! Has the chairman turned up yet ?

WARRENDER : He is in his room.

PONSONBY : It doesn't matter. In fact, I'm rather glad we can have a chance of a few words in private before this first session takes place to-day. Sit down, please.

WARRENDER : What ?

PONSONBY : Oh, do. (*He forces WARRENDER into a seat.*) Now tell me, is anything the matter with you ? For a few days past you've looked not quite the thing ! (*WARRENDER half rises.*) No, do sit down, my dear man. Something on your nerves ? Too much gossip about, eh ? Have you seen that one or two of the financial dailies have been having a go at you ? Suggestions of sharp practice ?

WARRENDER (*savagely*) : Let 'em write what they like ! That's what they're there for.

PONSONBY (*soothingly*) : Quite—quite ! And the Tories are putting some sort of question in the House to-morrow ? It's a nuisance, isn't it ? But that's how City life goes. . . . The career of all big financiers has begun by their enemies calling them sharks.

WARRENDER You think I'm joining the aquarium ?

PONSONBY The first ten thousand a man makes always starts the first scandal ! You'll get used to it—the ten thousand *and* the scandal

WARRENDER (*nervy*) Look here, what are you really getting at ?

PONSONBY (*rising, more ominously*) You want to know it ? Well, here it is ! It seems to me that there must be some mystery about this man Kubinsky himself No one's ever seen him

WARRENDER What do we want with him ? A solicitor's representing him

PONSONBY (*malevolently*) But you'll admit my dear man, that there is something pretty fishy about it all First that original draft scheme goes astray—most curiously ! Some say that he slipped off to South America where he lost his money and his factory went bust . . . some say that he's in a mad-house The family themselves seem to think he must be dead ! In all events, there's going to be quite a fur amount of obscurity when we come to set up the new board of directors to-day Something (*silently*) even a bit "peculiar," shall we say my dear man ?

WARRENDER (*starting up*) Now look here, Ponsonby, I tell you

[YVONNE comes in

YVONNE Good morning, you two

WARRENDER Good morning, Yvonne

PONSONBY Good morning, dear lady We'll have more to say about this later, Warrender.

[He goes out

YVONNE (*springing at WARRENDER*) Where do I come from this time, Randolph ? Three guesses !

WARRENDER Dressmaker's

YVONNE Wrong for you !

WARRINDER Riding in the Park with Stephen Farley ?

YVONNE Not this morning

WARRINDER An early round of golf ?

YVONNE I'm not quite as hearty as that

WARRINDER I give it up, then

YVONNE I've just motored down from the Kubinsky works

WARRENDER You mean to say that you went out to Walton ?

YVONNE Yes—I was curious to see what it really looked like the factory

WARRINDER Our factory !

YVONNE "Oui" factory I couldn't wait any longer I wanted to have one look at it

WARRINDER How did you like it ?

YVONNE It's a dream ! There's really nothing lovelier in the world than a dream come to life ! Don't you feel it in the marrow that it's all becoming "palpable" ?

WARRINDER I do !

YVONNE (*lyrically*) To-morrow the great power engine will begin to work, the cogs and bolts will turn, the cement-mills will grind, and the syrens will blow a serenade to Employment as lovely a serenade as a man ever devised for a woman

WARRINDER Yvonne !

YVONNE By the way, I forgot In the great park near there, there's a little country house—the house that's meant for the factory director

WARRENDER It's empty, I suppose ?

YVONNE And a bit neglected— but it could easily be got going again.

WARRENDER : Is it true that Stephen Farley—— ?

YVONNE : It's got lovely big windows——

WARRENDER : Is it true that Stephen Farley's going to be given the job of director of the Kubinsky works ?

YVONNE : Central heating could be put in——

WARRENDER : For Stephen Farley ?

YVONNE : And the bathrooms would want doing up properly——

WARRENDER (*fiercely*) Are you going to marry Stephen Farley ?

YVONNE : I'm going to marry the director of the Kubinsky factory !

WARRENDER : And who's he ?

YVONNE : You, my lovely ! (*She kisses him.*)

WARRENDER (*springing away from her after a moment*) : No such luck ! Impossible !

YVONNE : Why on earth ?

WARRENDER : Because before I could get appointed they'd want all my personal data ! They'd start a search for my name on the bank-books— my pedigree on the card indexes downstairs . . . and they'd find that I've got no card whatsoever . . . and that their future managing director simply didn't belong to them !

YVONNE : Gosh ! I ought to have seen about that ! But things have gone so far— surely they can't un-gun you now ?

WARRENDER (*sarcastically*) Can't they just ! Worse than ever ! Here they are already beginning to boast— each and every one of them— that the Kubinsky conception was his own personal idea ! If the truth about me ever came out, the whole lot of them would be laughing stocks, from the directors to Board of Trade people, from Lord Farley to your father. . . .

YVONNE : And then we *should* all go up in smoke . . . !

[*A crowd comes in—the* CHAIRMAN, PONSONBY, LORD FARLEY, FITCH, NICHOLSON, and HOLLMAN.

CHAIRMAN : Well, that's settled then. . . . And now, gentlemen, I want to speak—in your presence—a rather particular word or two in the ear of our good friend Warrender. . . . Here a minute, Mr. Fitch !

FITCH : Yes, sir ?

CHAIRMAN : Pop down as fast as you can into the personal secretary's office, and bring up Mr. Warrender's file here

FITCH (*nervously*) : Mr. Warrender's file ? The file of Mr. Warrender . . . ?

PONSONBY : That's exactly what the chairman said ! What are you staring at us about ? We're waiting !

FITCH : I'm very sorry, sir. I'll . . . I'll bring it at once.

[*He hurries out*

WARRENDER : My personal file here ? Er . . . forgive me . . . but what do we want with that ?

CHAIRMAN (*heartily*) Don't play the little innocent with us, my boy. . . . We know all about you ! So listen. (*He prepares for a little chairman's speech.*) My dear friend and colleague . . . all of us here, who have had the pleasure of being your colleagues, recognise and respect the immense labour and service you have put in on this undertaking. In small recognition of this . . . I have been asked—and I'm very proud I've been asked—to tell you that you have been unanimously nominated to the post of managing director of the newly-formed Kubinsky's Limited . . . (*Breaking off*) The contract is waiting

on my table. Let me be the first to congratulate you, my dear boy— my dear managing director, I should say. (*He shakes his hand.*)

ALL : Bravo ! Very good ! Congratulations !

[*They surround WARRENDER and felicitate him.*]

WARRENDER (*determinedly*) : One moment, gentlemen. . . . I am unable to accept the position that you so kindly offer me !

CHAIRMAN : *What ?*

PONSONBY : What's the matter with you ?

FARLEY (*amazed*) : You don't *want* to be made managing director ?

WARRENDER (*recklessly*) : No, no. . . . Excuse me a minute ! May I rush after Fitch and call him back ? My reference file won't be wanted after all.

CHAIRMAN : But listen to this. . . . This . . . diffidence on your part places me in a very difficult position. We rather wanted to have a little joyful surprise for you. We must really ask you to give us some explanation.

WARRENDER (*still recklessly*) : There isn't any explanation to give ! I simply don't *want* promotion. I haven't only been working to get a fat job for myself ! I won't take a better job . . . and I don't *want* any more salary. . . .

PONSONBY : Well, that's the first time I've heard anyone say *that* !

FARLEY : I wish *my* staff would think along those lines.

WARRENDER : I *liked* working at my little desk here . . . I loved it. I beg you, gentlemen, leave me alone here.

CHAIRMAN (*rather sternly*) : My boy, this sort of thing won't do at all—no, not at all ! All I have said holds good. . . . What have you got to say about it ?

WARRENDER (*looks at YVONNE—desperately*) : All right, sir, I'll take on your managing director's job. I'll take it on if you say I must ! But *you* must be responsible, then, for what's coming now. . . .

CHAIRMAN : I'm afraid I don't follow you.

WARRENDER (*bracing himself*) : Then I'll say it ; it's this. In the midst of my prodigious labours, there's one little point that I forgot to acquaint you with. . . .

PONSONBY : What was it ?

WARRENDER : That I don't actually happen . . . to be a member of the staff of this noble bank. . . .

HOLLMAN : Not on the staff ?

ALL : *What ? !*

WARRENDER : I'm here without any contract, without a job, without a salary. . . .

PONSONBY (*angrily*) : What on earth are you talking about ?

WARRENDER : Yes, gentlemen, that's the truth. I'm an impostor, if you care to call it that. The Kubinsky business is my invention. . . .

CHAIRMAN : That's not true ! It exists in reality !

WARRENDER : Yes, *now* it does. And through the signature of the chairman—on a faked letter.

ALL : Faked letter ? !

PONSONBY : Are you suggesting it's all a very bad joke ?

WARRENDER : A bad joke for *me* ! But it looks like turning out a good enough joke for all the rest of you !

CHAIRMAN : I can't believe it. It's swindling.

WARRENDER : It's swindling ? All right then—telephone the police !

CHAIRMAN . No, no, no (*To LORD FARLEY*)
Alfred, what do you think about all this ?

FARLEY I think I'd better *not* think .

CHAIRMAN (*perplexed*) Yvonne you know
Warrender pretty well Do you believe all this ?

YVONNE (*her big moment arrived*) I don't know
it—but it all sounds very exciting to me
Gentlemen ! You've all done nothing for this
man at all—but he's done something for you ,
a new sphere of work seems to have come into
being Chuck him out because of it ? Hand him
over to the police ? Have him locked up ? Even
if he is an impostor—everyone else gains some-
thing by what he's done He alone doesn't seem
to get a farthing

CHAIRMAN But, Yvonne .

YVONNE (*much worked up*) But that's the size
of it, isn't it ? (*Sarcastically*) And if you do chuck
him out, then you'll all be in the happy position
of living on the dividends that the ' impostor '
has brought you

CHAIRMAN I hope I've got it quite clear
You've worked here by my side without an
official job, and without an official halfpenny ?

NICHOLSON (*launing*) Can there be such a
feller ?

WARRENDER Yes, gentlemen Without an
official ha'penny And nobody spotted it ! So
there evidently can be such a feller

PONSONBY (*sharply*) I was always at a loss from
the very beginning to know where you came
from.

NICHOLSON I didn't recognise him, if you'll
remember

HOLLMAN He was an utter stranger to me

FARLEY (*with some malice*) But we all began to
remember all about him pretty soon.

CHAIRMAN (*in triumph*) : Then I was the only one that really did recognise him. Oh, yes, where was it? At some concert or other. (*He gropes feverishly in the recesses of his mind.*) At the Mozart Third Symphony. . . . But, all the same, this is really unheard-of and rather shocking.

FARLEY · I think it rather funny.

CHAIRMAN (*bitterly*) : I'd find it very funny as well—if it happened in *your* bank. . . . Now, if I only knew what on earth I ought to do with this man . . .

WARRENDER Don't you worry Very simple, Mr. Chairman I'll simply fade away quietly. I'll take my hook

[*FITCH enters with a strange look in his eyes.*

CHAIRMAN · What the devil do you want?

FITCH Forgive me, but this is important. The personal secretary's office has sent up the file you asked for—Mr Warrender's file

ALL Mr Warrender's file?

WARRENDER (*incredulously*) · My file ?

CHAIRMAN : There, I knew I'd seen it somewhere

FITCH (*handing him a long envelope*) The cashier's also got some salary for you . he wants you to check it up, please Income Tax has been deducted

[*All stare in astonished silence at WARRENDER. He immediately becomes master of the situation, sits down at the long table, and quietly counts out the notes.*

WARRENDER (*sitting*) . What have we here? Ten, twenty, thirty—one, two, three.

[*All move to him.*

CHAIRMAN (*staring at him*) · All correct, I hope?

WARRENDER I think so. Thank you, sir.

CHAIRMAN : There you are !

PONSONBY : And your reference file ?

[WARRENDER gives it to him.]

CHAIRMAN : My dear boy, why have you made such fools of us ?

WARRENDER (*getting up*) . Why ? Well, I'll tell you. (*He gropes for an impromptu reason.*) Because I suddenly wanted to know what exactly would happen if I were only known here in the bank by the work I did for it. You approved of my work—but when you thought I wasn't on the files of the bank—disgraceful ! Throw him out ! Call in the police ! At the last second a little bit of paper comes along . . . and you trust that ten times as much. . . . Great is the power of the pen ! (*He looks at those around him with contempt.*)

CHAIRMAN : My dear man, I suppose you're in a rage about it . . . but I'm rather in a rage as well, aren't I ? The idea that any such thing could really have happened in my bank . . .

PONSONBY : Well, I'm glad to say that I wasn't taken in for a second.

WARRENDER : Thank you (*Shakes hands.*)

PONSONBY : The idea that anyone could have slipped through the meshes of a brilliant organisation like ours . . .

HOLMAN : After all, he was my pupil

CHAIRMAN : You rascal ! You gave us quite a fright for the moment. You nearly took me in. But he's the man for the job all right. And now, gentlemen, shall we put our signatures to the appointment ?

[*The CHAIRMAN goes out.*]

All this to be played quickly and not to hold up the action.

HOLMAN : Well, congratulations on the job.

[*He shakes hands with WARRENDER and follows the CHAIRMAN.*

NICHOLSON (*crossing to WARRENDER*) : But you pulled our legs pretty badly, didn't you?

[*He pats him on the shoulder and goes after the CHAIRMAN.*

FARLEY (*alone with WARRENDER a minute*) : Excellent ! It amused me more than I can say. Poor old Charlie !

[*He, too, goes out.*

WARRENDER (*wiping his forehead*) : Phew . . . that's a miracle I *don't* understand . . . ! My utterly non-existent reference file suddenly comes to life. . .

FITCH (*suddenly and for the first time taking a tone of lofty contempt for WARRINDLER*) : Idiot !

WARRENDER : What's that?

FITCH : I said idiot !

WARRENDER . Slotty ! My dear Slotty, you don't mean to say that you . . . ?

[*He goes across to FITCH.*

FITCH (*bitterly*) . Yes . . . I did it ! I cooked up a file for you, and smuggled your name on to the salary list. (*With a catch in his throat*) It's the first fraud that I've ever committed in my life.

WARRINDER Slotty, my dear fellow, I won't forget this.

FITCH : I didn't do it to get any better job out of it ! (*Bitterly still*) Remember, I'm a pedant—or so you've called me. I can't stand it when a book lies crooked on an office table. . . . How do you think I could stand it when a man was buzzing about the office all day whose card-references weren't even on the card-index ? (*Apologetically to YVONNE*) You see, the card-catalogue must be in order—even at the price of a forgery !

WARRENDER : How did you manage it ?

FITCH : I simply took you over from the staff of a branch office we used to have in Paris.

WARRENDER : Well—I'm hellish grateful to you, dear Slotty, in all events. But don't say you did it *only* for the sake of your everlasting "order" !

YVONNE : You surely did it a *bit* out of friendship, didn't you ?

FITCH (*adjusting his spectacles*) : You see, funnily enough you said you rather liked me ; and at times I don't mind you. Somebody had to help you, you old idiot.

[*He goes out, much moved.*]

The CHAIRMAN comes in from the office.

CHAIRMAN : Where did they put that file ?

YVONNE : Pop !

CHAIRMAN : What is it ?

YVONNE : Do you much mind what people say about you ?

CHAIRMAN : Not in the least as long as it's nice.

YVONNE . But would you be frightfully hurt . . . if people were to say that you'd done all this about the Kubinsky factory—to get the managing director's job for your own son-in-law ?

CHAIRMAN (*puzzled*) But, my dear girl, the managing director of Kubinsky's is going to be Warrender. . . .

YVONNE : Exactly !

CHAIRMAN : What ? You don't mean—— ?

YVONNE : Yes, I do. Rather !

CHAIRMAN : But . . . Yvonne . . . darling . . . kiss your father.

YVONNE (*kissing him*) : Pop ! . . . My angel . . . !

CHAIRMAN My dear boy, I'm delighted You were always a favourite of mine. But what am I to say to Farley ? Officially, you're still supposed to be marrying his Stephen

YVONNE That's a teaser

CHAIRMAN I've got it ! I can say to him exactly the same as you said to me *He* mustn't have any family favouritism !

[Enter FARLEY, PONSONBY, NICHOLSON, and HOLLMAN

FARLEY Here, I say, what's all this ?

CHAIRMAN Look at them, my dear man Now I suppose you'll say I created the post of managing director for my own son-in-law ?

FARLEY Son-in-law ? Then you and I are not, after all, to be more closely related ?

CHAIRMAN They tell me no We've been such good friends for so long, wouldn't it be a pity to go and spoil it all by adding family complications ?

[*The OFFICE BOY brings extra chairs on*

FARLEY Yes, yes, it might have been dangerous

ALI Congratulations, Warrender Congratulations, Yvonne

CHAIRMAN Now, gentlemen, shall we get to business ?

[*They all take their seats, WARRINDER and YVONNE on settee, laughing*

Warrender, are you aware there is a meeting going on ? An informal one, I admit, but still a meeting

WARRINDER I beg your pardon (*He moves to his seat at the CHAIRMAN's side*)

[YVONNE joins PONSONBY at the table

CHAIRMAN (*rising*): Gentlemen, from now on we are constituted the managing board of the new Kubinsky Limited Liability Company.

[ROBERTS bustles in from the Board of Trade.

ROBERTS: Good morning, gentlemen. Mr. Chairman, the one thing the Board of Trade is wanting now is this Kubinsky fellow. Have you found him yet?

WARRENDER: Not yet, we've searched everywhere. But surely his presence isn't vital?

ROBERTS (*aggressively*): I am sorry to disagree, but the Board of Trade absolutely refuse to complete without him.

CHAIRMAN: But, really, Mr. Roberts . . .

ROBERTS: No . . . no, there's going to be a question in the House, and we daren't risk an attack.

FARLEY: He's quite right, Charlie, we daren't risk an attack.

[*Violent voices of WILLIAM and the OLD GENTLEMAN of the First and Second Act are heard offstage.*

WARRENDER: But the Board of Trade can't back out at the last minute like this.

ROBERTS: FIND Kubinsky!!

WARRENDER: But, look here . . . (*Worried*) Good heavens, what is all that row going on? George, go and see what it is.

[*The OLD GENTLEMAN is forcing his way in past the protesting bodies of the COMMISSIONAIRE and OFFICE BOY.*

WILLIAM: Sorry, gentlemen, I couldn't stop him.

OLD GENTLEMAN: I must speak to the chairman.

WARRENDER: This is an important conference. What do you want anyway, Mr. . . .?

OLD GENTLEMAN (*humbly and brokenly*) : Only the job of night-watchman, if you could, sir. I've got a good character ; I'm sixty-three—my name's Kubinsky, and . . .

ALL (*with something like a shriek*) : Kubinsky ! ! !

[*General astonished suspense.*]

WARRENDER : Kubinsky, did you say ? !

OLD GENTLEMAN (*terrified*) : Yes. Peter Kubinsky . . . and why not ?

WARRENDER (*furiously*) : Why didn't you say so at first ?

OLD GENTLEMAN (*moving to door to secure his retreat*) : All right, don't chuck me out. I'll go of my own accord. . . .

WARRENDER (*strenuously*) : No, you won't ! You'll stay here ! My dear Mr. Kubinsky, we've got a very pleasant piece of news for you. We all want you to come on the board of directors.

OLD GENTLEMAN (*unable to believe the evidence of his ears*) : The board of directors ?

ALL (*like a pack of wolves*) : Yes ! !

OLD GENTLEMAN (*morosely*) : Oh dear . . . oh dear. A little job of night-watchman would have been so much more secure. . . .

[*He sits down very slowly.*]

A roar of laughter reaches to the heavens.

CURTAIN

